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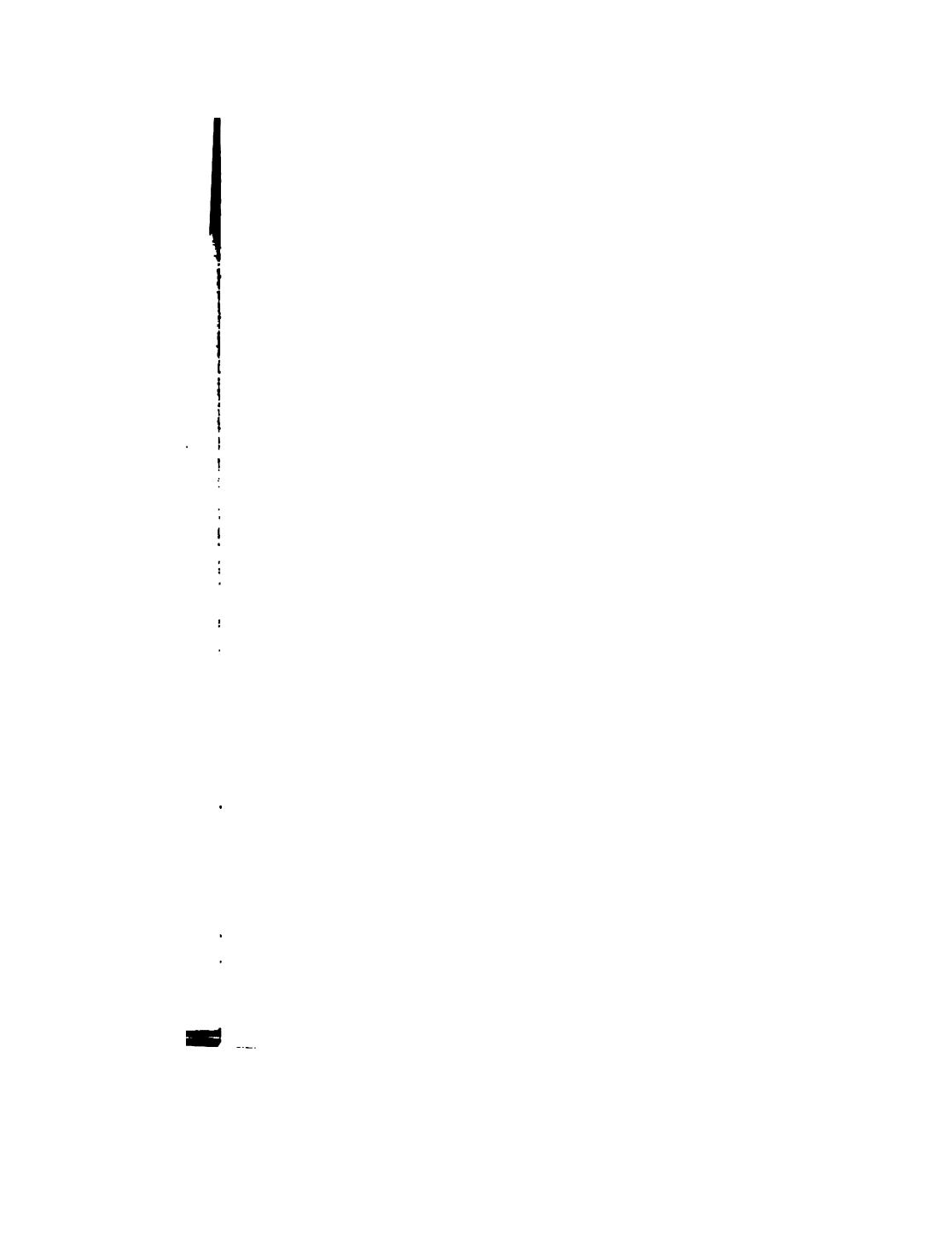
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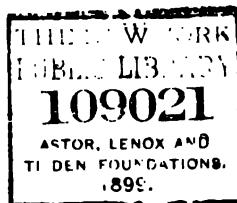


IN THE DWELLINGS OF SILENCE A ROMANCE OF
RUSSIA BY WALKER KENNEDY



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IN THE DWELLINGS OF SILENCE.

CHAPTER I.

THE BALL AT THE WINTER PALACE.

“I’ve had enough of the country.”

“The country is good enough.”

“Pshaw! You look entirely at the surface, Frank. You’ve never touched the nerve of the Russian people. You form the acquaintance of the women, and one look at a handsome face is enough to make you forget the rest of the world.”

“Before I came here, I expected to find the streets filled with gory Nihilists, the papers crammed with discoveries of dynamite plots, and the whole country wrapped in gloom. There is an air of mystery about some things; but why should one annoy one’s self about that?”

Mystery is a very good cover for a multitude of sins.”

“We certainly have no ground to complain of the treatment we have received here.”

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“Oh, no ; it’s a part of the Russian policy to treat us like lords. They don’t want us to look under the surface. They gorge us with gaiety, overwhelm us with courtesy, and smother us with flattery. And we go away thinking the Czar a brick, and St. Petersburg the finest place in the world.”

“You may be right. Still, I don’t like to leave.”

“I suppose not. Under similar circumstances I should not care to go either.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Simply that there lives in St. Petersburg one Valérie Melnikoff, keeper of the heart of one Frank Devereux.”

“I cannot deny it.”

“That would be absurd. But, tell me, have you run amuck of any of the infernal restrictions of the country yet, any imperial ukases against the marriage of Russian beauties to American gentlemen ?”

“My lips have never been opened yet on the one subject. I can chat with her easily enough on the opera, the play, the court; but when it comes to telling her how I feel toward her, I find it impossible.”

“Stuff ! It ought to be no trouble to tell her what she knows already. That’s not the great difficulty. Her father’s a general whose occu-

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pation in life is to keep on good terms with the Czar. He has done good service for his master; but there are several higher rounds in the ladder, and he is naturally of a climbing nature. The favour of the Czar is the breath of his life."

"What are you driving at?"

"Suppose the Czar should like to marry one of his noble knights to the daughter of one of his bravest generals?"

"Suppose that the moon is not peopled with lunatics! If Valérie Melnikoff loves me and is willing to marry me, all the crowned heads in Europe shall not stand in the way."

"Spoken like the royal American that you are! But, my dear fellow, this is an absolute, insufferable despotism, and the Czar has a way of sending people to the North Pole who don't agree with him."

"Don't talk nonsense, George! The Czar has other large fish to fry. By Jove! it's nearly nine o'clock, and we have barely time to reach the palace."

"I am ready."

"The troïka should be below now."

The young men had completed their toilettes, and in a few minutes were bundled up in their great-coats.

It was the evening of the 14th of January,

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18—, and the two men were dressing for a court ball at the Winter Palace. They were Americans, the elder being the United States Consul, the other a Secretary of Legation. Through the offices of the United States Minister they had secured invitations. It was an unusual concession ; and, democratic though they were, they were not a little elated over their success. The balls at the Winter Palace were at that period rare, for reasons satisfactory to the Czar ; and, by common report, they were the most magnificent in the world. Rich American mammas, had they been very numerous in Russia, would doubtless have parted with some of the gold-mines of their husbands for the privilege of lifting the veil and passing the threshold of the delicious *terra incognita*. Nothing in the way of social glory that France in the grasp of *le grand monarque* had celebrated, or England in her fabulously wealthy present has attempted, or Germany with the prestige of her powerful Kaiser, could be compared with the receptions of the Man who owned absolutely the people of half of Europe and half of Asia. George Vandorn, the elder of the two men, was a New Yorker, who only a few weeks before the day on which he is presented to the reader, had been left a snug fortune by the thoughtful demise of an uncle, whose very existence he had almost

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forgotten. George owed his good fortune to the fact that he was the only member of his family who entertained the same political views as his uncle. Along with the will was a private letter for the astonished heir, which contained this explanation :—

“ You will doubtless be surprised to find yourself my heir; and perhaps I owe you an explanation. Personally I know nothing about you, as I have not seen you since you were a baby; but I learn from the papers that you have received an appointment under this administration. So I know that your politics must be sound. As soon as I picked up this piece of agreeable news, I said to myself, ‘ Thank God ! there’s one member of the family, beside myself, who is not a fool;’ and from that time you have been my heir.”

“ That’s what I call practical politics,” said the fortunate heir to Frank.

“ He has taken a great liberty with you,” remarked Frank, laughing.

“ But the temptation to accept his apology is too strong for me,” said George. “ The old fellow leaves me half a million.”

Vandorn was a trifle under the average height, and a trifle over the average weight. He was round and good-humoured, and not lacking in shrewdness and philosophy. He was not fond of unnecessary exertion, though he was a miracle of activity under the spur of a great oppor-

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tunity. An inquiring mind accompanied an inert body. As he never suffered any beard to grow on his round, ruddy face, he looked cherubic, guileless, and bland. He was just the man to shine in club life, for he enjoyed a bit of gossip or a game of cards; he revelled in the delicate little dreams of the French *chefs*, and he kept up with the news of the turf and the stage. He was in every way a delightful fellow. He and Devereux were graduates of Harvard, where their friendship had been grounded on a rock; and it had never waned. He was of one of the old New York families, and could look back to grandfathers and great grandfathers who had been members of Congress and ministers to several of the European Courts; and so it had not been a difficult matter for the United States Minister to obtain for him an invitation to the Czar's ball.

Frank Devereux was a native of the State of Kentucky. He was tall and sinewy, blue-eyed, brown-haired, and full-bearded. His face was open, with lines indicative of firmness and dignity. Vandorn described him as royally oblivious of the small things happening about him. There was a chivalrous atmosphere about him. Possibly his appearance had something to do with this. Women thought of him as a possible knight-errant who had inadvertently strayed

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out of the Middle Ages into a flat, prosaic time. Some of the best blood of Kentucky flowed in his veins. He owned a blue-grass farm and was a wealthy man, his father having been a senator of the United States, as well as one of the richest men in his own commonwealth. Devereux, disliking to be idle, and averse to settling down too early in life as a landed gentleman, was favourably impressed with the diplomatic service, especially as it gave him employment and extended the limits of his observation and experience. He knew Paris, London, and Berlin well already, and he was curious about St. Petersburg. So it was altogether a happy arrangement that sent him and his college chum to that city.

They had been in St. Petersburg about two years, when the people of the United States, with that charming abandon which characterizes them in their political dealings, concluded to change parties. The fetish which Vandorn and Devereux worshipped was swept to the earth, and the other fetish set up in its place. Necessarily the change of idols—the substitution of Gog for Magog—signified an entire disarrangement of the civil service of the United States. Marching orders were given to an army of one hundred thousand breadwinners, and one hundred thousand men, with different coloured

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feathers in their caps, took their places. An entire change in the consular and diplomatic system was ordered, and in a few weeks Vandorn and Devereux would no longer be serving their country. For social reasons Devereux regretted this; but Vandorn was fretting to get back to America, where he could spend some of the fortune that had been left him, and could industriously squander some of the leisure which had been bequeathed to him with it.

It was a cold, clear night, with a kind of cold clearness of which Russia seems to possess the monopoly. Vandorn and Devereux were bundled up until they resembled huge bears. Their troïka was waiting, and it was soon bearing them over the snow with the swiftness of a swallow. The stars shivered perceptibly in the clear winter sky, and the electric lights trembled pallidly in their glass receptacles. Wherever their radiance shone, the streets were paved with diamonds. It was a bitter night, and every wayfarer was hurrying to some place of shelter, while drozhkies, sleighs, and troïkas whirled through the streets at a spinning pace. Occasionally from one of the sleighs, inwoven with the music of the bells, came music of gay laughter, proving that pleasure was having an outing.

The troïka containing the two Americans

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sped along the *Sadovaya*, and then turned into the *Prospekt Nevskiy*, the leading avenue of the city. They flew past brilliantly illumined bazaars and rich shops filled with animation. The huge, dispiriting Anitchkoff Palace stood out black and cyclopean from its nest of snow, and was passed in a trice. The ugly Cathedral of the Virgin of Kazan—an architectural nightmare—loomed up before them and then faded behind the swift trotters.

The Admiralty was swiftly reached, and the *izvoshchik* driving them about it, rounded into the Quay, transferring them into a marvellous scene. For three miles the granite embankment stretched along the left shore of the Neva. All descriptions of softly gliding vehicles crowded the fashionable thoroughfare. Palace after palace shining with countless lights abutted on the street. The river was frozen over, and its glittering surface rang with the metallic music of the skates. Parallel rows of gas-lights bent around the outer rim of the rose-colored embankment and the sidewalk fronting the palaces, and re-enforced by occasional electric lights, brought to view hundreds of flashing sleighs upon the surface of the river. The Quay seemed like the outer wall of some gigantic fortress or castle, holding the frozen river at bay.

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Just where the Court of the Admiralty opens upon the Quay they passed the bronze equestrian statue of Peter the Great, the fiery steed prancing on his hind legs, while the rider, like a warrior magician, points his hand toward the great city, the creation of his indomitable will.

Eastward of the Admiralty stood the Winter Palace, a rather bizarre building, now ablaze with myriad lights. In front of it dozens of fires were burning brightly in grates, placed there for the *izvoshchiks* who had been engaged by the guests of the Czar, and were required to stand in the street until their services should be again demanded. These red fires, and the rough-looking drivers gathered about them, made a weird and fantastic scene.

Across the river, nearly opposite the Winter Palace, stood the Petropavlooski Fortress, holding within its walls the cathedral which is the burial-place of the Romanoff Czars. From the windows of the palace the mightiest ruler in the world can look over the river at the dark and terrible fortress which has been the burial-place of so many bright hopes and splendid lives, and know that he too will one day sleep the long sleep within its stony embrace.

A number of scantily clad and pitiful-looking persons were gathered near the palace as the troïka bearing the two Americans drove up.

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They were poor devils who were anxious to obtain a reflected gleam of paradise. Most of them hoped to steal a glimpse of some of the grand dames as they ascended the steps. There was some pleasure to be extracted from even the diluted light of royalty and power. Drozhkies and sleighs were arriving every minute, and emptying out what seemed to be waddling bundles of furs, but were in reality dainty dames and elegant courtiers, whose splendour was housed therein.

If there was something melancholy and desolate in the cold prospect, with its flaring lights streaming out upon the frozen snow, the black glooms across the river, and the dismal drivers and burlaks stamping about in the snow to keep warm, it all disappeared for the two Americans as soon as they had passed into the palace.

Well might they think that they had crossed the portals of dreamland ! For the mighty Czar had waved his wand, and evoked a scene of enchantment. All their previous conceptions of great entertainments were defied and set at naught by this dazzling bewilderment of colour. Strangely stirring music seemed to have stolen over the desert snows from the passionate heart of Hungary, moving them with a sense of mysterious awe which no scepticism could dispel.

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Both of our friends were thoroughly republican, and both knew that they were the peers of the Czar in every quality that pertains to true manhood, yet they felt their own littleness — even the littleness of those qualities usually esteemed great — in the presence of this display of barbaric power. Stately dames, wearing laces and gems equivalent to a king's ransom, swept up the staircases ; handsome cavaliers in flashing uniforms, with clanking swords at their sides, followed in their train ; glittering knights in armour were ranked about the walls ; and representatives from foreign governments, brilliantly attired and decorated with a profusion of medals and orders, lent the individuality of their national types to the splendid scene.

The lofty pillars were girdled with palms, myrtles, and dracænas ; and here and there were tiny nooks hidden in palm-trees. Some of the apartments near the great ball-room were transformed into groves of camellias ; and there were improvised lawns charmingly ensnared with hyacinths, lilies-of-the-valley, and flowering roses. Occasionally the wild song of the Tsiganes haunted the heart of the flowers, or trembled amid the forest of evergreens, lending a touch of magic to the occasion. The chandeliers were magnificent suspended pyramids of lights, which brought out the exquisite beauty of the ceilings

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and walls, and, through the arched doorways, opened up long perspectives of splendour.

Nowhere save in Russia was such a brilliant gathering a possibility. The Russians have an eye for colour, and no time or place is too solemn for it ; and this love of colour is not confined to one sex. The soldiers revel in it, and their uniforms are almost as varied as the flowers of the field. It was this which made the court ball a vast bouquet of piquant nationalities.

The Cossacks could readily be distinguished by their long beards and their showy tunics gleaming with silver ornamentation. The dashing Lancers in their crimson jackets fluttered about like so many red-breasted grosbeaks, while the stolid Hussars in green uniforms stood upon their dignity and the poverty of their conversational powers. Stalwart young chevaliers, holding in their hands gleaming helmets topped with silver eagles spreading silver pinions, promenaded with handsome women, whose bright eyes did not veil their admiration ; but perhaps the most conspicuous soldiers present were the Hussars of the Guard, whose white jackets were embroidered with gold and trimmed with soft fur. It was easy to see that they were the pets of the army and of the women.

The high functionaries of the Empire, old and

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ugly, and laden with decorations, were present. Here might be seen the “portrait ladies,” who wear the likeness of the Empress in a frame of brilliants, and who are experts in the etiquette and traditions of court life. There strutted, peacockwise, the dignified chamberlains, with the golden key on their backs ; and the *fréilini*, who wear a monogram of the Empress in diamonds fastened to the left shoulder with a knot of blue ribbon, were the recipients of special attention. There were in attendance great generals whose deeds were on every tongue, and governors of provinces who had ridden hard over frozen steppes to lay their homage at the feet of the Emperor. A famous Circassian prince, in his costume of fur and velvet, covered with chains of jewels and gold, hobnobbed with an important-looking personage dressed in a long scarlet gown and carrying a huge cimeter in his belt sparkling with luminous gems—the Commander of the Cossack Guard, he who watches over the safety of the Czar. Dozens of minor personages in gaudy costumes could be seen mingling deferentially with the guests and ministering to their pleasure ; graceful pages of the Empress in white suits ornamented with lace and glittering with gold ; busy runners with long plumed hats ; black negroes in striking costumes ; Tartar servitors of the palace, and many minor digni-

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taries from Finnland, China, Corea, and the steppes of Asia, were everywhere.

At nine o'clock all the guests had assembled in the White Room, and the Czar and members of the royal family were announced. It was not strange that hearts should quicken at the announcement, even those of our two Americans, who looked like black crows amid that gilded aviary. Even the staunchest of hearts beats faster when confronted by the power that awes the world. One may analyze it as he will, and assure himself that the possessor of it inherited it, or came by it through accident and no merit of his own, but the power is there, stolid, unconquerable, and unmoved by one's speculations. Reared under ordinary circumstances, it is hard to imagine that the Czar would have risen above the level of mediocrity. His own country numbers thousands of men who are his superiors in every respect; yet, by virtue of no personal eminence, he is the most powerful individual in the world. If the President of the United States, in addition to selecting his cabinet, had the power of appointing all the members of Congress, the officers of the army, and the heads of the civil service; if he chose the bishops of an established church; if he enjoyed the undisputed privilege of making all the laws, and repealing them at will; if he

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were the editor-in-chief of all the newspapers, and allowed nothing to go in them which was in any way prejudicial to any of his powers ; if he were the head of a church which helped to forge the chains of slavery upon all the people, and for withdrawing from which one might be banished to the frozen solitudes of Siberia ; and if this President could order any American citizen hanged for advocating a curtailment of his authority, such a ruler would enjoy no privileges except those possessed by the Romanoff.

For the Czar prescribes the religion of his people, controls the utterance of the press, inhibits freedom of speech, holds the lives of his subjects in his hands, even sits in judgment on their unspoken thoughts, and can punish them for violations of the law which he, or any of his underlings, suspects they intend to commit at some time in the future. Verdicts of juries do not impede, nor the investigations of courts deter. With an army supported by the state at his back, a church moulded to sustain his autocracy, and vast hordes of office-holders dependent upon his pleasure, he can ignore juries and a timid public sentiment, muzzle the press, banish those who do not agree with him, and override any principle of justice that he wills. He is absolutely pervasive over half of Asia and half of Europe ; he rules wandering Tar-

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tars and conquered Poles, furious Cossacks and nomad Kirghiz, Bulgarians, Czechs, Serbs, and thirty other peoples. He is Russia, in short—the hub around which everything revolves. Right or wrong, such power is his.

Our Americans had some such feeling when they beheld the portly and impassive man, clad in the uniform of the soldier, who entered the White Room. This was the mightiest ruler of the earth, this man who never smiled, whose face seemed to proclaim the hollowness of joy and the vanity of all living. As Vandorn and Devereux looked upon him they felt tangibly the atmosphere of mystery that enveloped the life of Russia, high or low; that haunted the dark corners and byways of the great cities, and floated in the rosy animation that filled the palace of the Czar.

After a short promenade about the room the dancing began, and the Czar retired to talk with some of his guests and vacantly observe the whirling figures. Even now he did not smile, this rigid, imperial man. No one could guess the man behind the masque. He viewed the scene tolerantly, but as if his heart was not in it. The stirring music of the mazurka moved him not. He seemed absolutely impervious to the ordinary springs of emotion, dead to the claims of enthusiasm.

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But the presence or the demeanour of the Czar did not embarrass the young people. They had perhaps grown accustomed to their ruler as a cold and distant personage who had no time for smiles. The mazurka awoke all the passion in their hearts. They whirled through its figures as if they were on fire with harmony, eyes a-sparkle, limbs swaying with sensuous grace, and fairy feet tapping the floor with perfect cadence.

Conspicuous in the crowd of lovely women was Valérie Melnikoff. So elusive is the essential charm of beauty that words are pale and inadequate to picture it with its unheard harmony, its ghost of frail colour, its indefinable and subtle graces. No description of Valérie Melnikoff that confined itself to the colour of her eyes, the tone of her complexion, the lovely precision of her profile, would possess any virtue of completeness or insight. The keynote to her character was its directness, and it is around this that we must wind the various threads of personality in order to detain a fleeting impression of her. This direct soul was incased in a lovely body, tingling with life and radiant youth. Her dark eyes were the faithful mirror of herself ; they were pure and beautiful, and in their depths dwelt the icons of gentleness and strength. About a brow as chaste as

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Parian marble hovered the faint shadow of a thoughtfulness not often observable in one so young, a shadow that tempered her vitality in a way that was indescribably soft and enchanting. The slightest trace of colour toyed with the purity of her cheeks, and her dark hair crowned her head with a rippling, delicate grace.

She had finished the mazurka with a tall Hussar of the Guards, and they had retired to a corner of the ball-room to rest. Her partner in the dance was a young man whose athletic form and soldierly bearing were conspicuous in his gold-embroidered white uniform and his high-topped boots; but there was a luminous malignity in his face which filled the souls of sensitive people with a nameless terror. He was dark, and, for so young a man, his expression was singularly cruel and sinister. His black eyes shone with a restless glitter; his nose was aggressively aquiline, and a small moustache failed to cover the cynical lines drawn about his mouth. But Ivan Valerianoff had fought well in the Asian campaigns, and he stood well in the army—Raphael-like faces not being a requisite for service under the Czar.

The Hussar and Valérie discovered two chairs vacant in the corner. The flowers and plants were grouped closely there, and they found themselves in a charming place for the

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exchange of confidences of any kind, for they were isolated from the rest of the company. Perhaps the young soldier had a reason for seeking this secluded place ; at any rate, he availed himself of it to tell her of his love.

Hardly had they seated themselves when he began, and with a dictatorial eagerness told her his wishes.

She recoiled before his burning eyes — they made her afraid — and the words of love which he crudely poured out — recoiled as one would before the tiger that licks one's hands with apparent friendliness.

“ I have never thought of such a thing as becoming your wife,” she answered as soon as she could stem the offensive torrent of his speech.

“ You must think of it,” he said ; “ and you must be my wife.”

“ I cannot. You need not expect it of me.”

“ But I do expect it of you,” he replied, his face flushing.

“ I will be perfectly frank with you, Ivan Valerianoff. What you ask is simply impossible.”

The orchestra had taken up the overture of “Carmen,” and the ball-room was flooded with brilliant Spanish notes, flying shreds of passion, tongues of flame, tossed hither and yon among the responsive assemblage.

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Listen ! and the whole scene takes form from the music. The soldiers and Spanish cigar-girls flirt in the square — Carmen sings the fateful *Havanaise* — the music pants and tingles with jealousy. Away it dances, while the Spanish coquette woos the rich measures of the gay *Seguidilla* near by the ramparts of old Seville, and Don José is bewitched with the song that has wounded his heart. Now the gypsies are singing in the cabaret to the accompaniment of the castanets ; and the music pirouettes and flashes in a tumult of frantic tones ; but, anon, a weird expectancy ripples through the orchestration, succeeded by the sweeping song of the *Toreador* — a wild, almost barbaric, song of triumph in love as in the arena ; and just at that moment its full significance seemed to enter the soul of Ivan Valerianoff, and awake the dreaming lion of jealousy.

“ You love some one else ? ” he almost hissed.

“ I cannot permit you to question me,” she said with dignity. “ We should be friends, for we have some hopes in common. I have no idea of marrying, and it should be sufficient when I say as kindly as I know how that I cannot accept your offer.”

The Carmen music ran through Valerianoff’s

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brain like streams of fire. His eyes gleamed with an indescribable light—such a light as Valérie had never seen before ; it filled her shrinking heart with dread. The man's teeth showed like those of a hungry animal, and his cheeks were flushed with anger. He was not trained for opposition, especially from those weaker than himself.

“I shall not accept your answer,” he said. “It will be easy to find out whether there is another. If there is—well, I swear he shall never have you!”

“And do you suppose,” she said with spirit, and with a glance which quailed not before his own, “that I would marry you if you came to me with red hands and a soul stained with murder ?”

“Who is it ? Tell me,” he said hoarsely. *Batiński!* The Devil was in the music, he thought.

Again came to his ears the taunting strains of the *Toreador's* song, touching him to the quick, causing in him the sense of defeat, and warning him that there was one who would triumph over him.

At that moment her eyes looked beyond him with an expression of pleasure. He too glanced that way, and his eyes dulled with the light of jealous rage. Their retreat had been invaded ;

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and, with perfect equanimity and a frank smile, Devereux, the Secretary of Legation, advanced to greet Valérie Melnikoff.

And the orchestra in a climax of splendid harmony celebrated the victory of Escamillo.

CHAPTER II.

THE FRENCH DIPLOMATE'S POINT OF VIEW.

THE intuitions of men in love are quick and positive. The American and the Russian knew instinctively that they were rivals. Devereux did not allow that knowledge to appear in his face. His diplomatic experience had made him too well-poised for that. The soldier was not so completely master of his feelings. He acknowledged the introduction brusquely, and, as soon as he could, made a sullen exit. Had he seen the look of mingled relief and pleasure on Valérie's face he would have been still more angry.

“Have you any idea how elusive you are?” said Devereux with a smile. “I have pursued you for an hour, and just as I thought I had you, you were swallowed up in the light.”

“I did not expect to see you here to-night,” she replied, in a tone which revealed her pleasure over the fact. “You are not a soldier, an

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officer, or an ambassador. Doesn't it seem odd to you to be a part of such a spectacle?"

"I feel like a pelican in the wilderness. I never was so dazzled and bewildered in my life."

"America is not like this?" she said with a little smile of arch triumph.

"Oh, no; in America we would put all this on a stage, and charge an admission fee to see it."

"And you confess to being dazzled? You Americans are usually so cool, I did not think it was possible to surprise you. It is a great triumph for Russia."

"I'm not accustomed to being in the same room with a Czar," said Devereux. "I have known some of our greatest generals, who have done wonders on the battle-field, and I have known great statesmen, but your Czar has a unique interest for me. He is so remote, so inaccessible, that I seem to be gazing on the ghost of Xerxes or the Great King of Babylon resurrected from the dust of ages. It is really overwhelming to think how millions of people can obtain their own consent to giving one man the absolute disposition of themselves and their country."

Valérie hesitated before she replied slowly and significantly, "My astonishment is almost equal to yours on that point."

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“ You are the first Russian I have met,” said Devereux, “ who does not worship the Czar.”

“ Oh, there are a great many of us who do not worship a Czar.”

“ I should like to know some of them.”

“ Do you mean that ? ” she asked quickly, her face assuming all at once a pretty seriousness that became it rarely.

“ I am in earnest,” said Devereux.

“ Then come to my home to-morrow evening and you shall know them.”

“ Agreed,” said he, not a little surprised.

“ Your entertainments in America are different from this ? ” she asked, as if to divert the talk into another channel.

“ They are indeed ! We have no central motive in our entertainments, as you have. Here every one seems to exist, to dance, to be beautiful for the Emperor. With us, there are a hundred different motives intermingled at a single entertainment. We have no Winter Palaces, and we would never attempt anything so elaborate as this. Some Americans, who have taste and money too, do give beautiful entertainments ; but this is the most magnificent ball I ever attended. Certainly the people that can afford to buy such diversion for their ruler — for of course they pay for it — ought to be happy.”

The French Diplomate's Point of View.

Valérie had no opportunity to reply. The music began again, and, as her card was filled, the *tête-à-tête* was broken. It had been for both of them perhaps the pleasantest dream during an evening of dreams ; for Valérie was fond of the young American, and, as we know, he was more than fond of the beautiful Russian. But Valérie was taken away by her partner, an Austrian diplomate, and as Devereux had had no opportunity to bespeak any of her favours, he did not gain another *tête-à-tête* with her that evening. But his eyes followed her often into the dance.

He looked at all the women present as they flashed by him resplendent in their costly toilettes and their shimmering jewels, and though there were among them many marvelously beautiful, Valérie was in his eyes the peerless flower in the bouquet of loveliness. The young gallants evidently agreed with him, for at her shrine seemed to hover more admiration and attention than at that of any other woman in the room. How happy she appeared to be ! Could such a radiant creature have a care in the world ? How superbly in consonance with the magnificences of court life she was !

The thought troubled him not a little ; for he wanted her for his wife. Perhaps she loved

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this gay, brilliant existence, and could not be induced to surrender it for what he could offer her. Doubtless she revered the traditions and customs of the fatherland, its princely ceremonies, its spectacular religion, its great military *esprit*. Could he give her anything that would be, in her eyes, an adequate substitute for all this? The answer to this question was a doubt.

He found Vandorn in the refreshment-room drinking a glass of wine with a courtly diplomat from the youthful republic of France. After introductions had been exchanged, Vandorn asked, "Why don't you dance, Frank?"

"For once in my life I find the dress-suit of civilized man conspicuous," said Devereux. "I'm afraid I might stop the dance if I entered it."

"It's a relief to get out of that Mardi gras procession," said Vandorn, with a look of comical disgust on his face.

"I think I should have gone in for it, if I had only thought to have a dress-suit made out of the Star Spangled Banner."

"M. Danton has been giving me some points on these people."

"It is one crystal hell," said the keen-faced Frenchman in English.

This coming from a Frenchman seemed pretty severe.

The French Diplomate's Point of View.

"You needn't put on that polite look of incredulity," said Vandorn to Devereux. "I myself have heard some piquant stories about the court of Alexander."

"Europe has nothing like it," said the Frenchman. "Why, these people are very *mal à propos*. They do not know how to conceal. In the time of the Cæsars a citizen loved anybody's wife but his own. It is the same here. It is not wickedness with these people. It is what you call the caprice, or the fashion. They do not know. *Dieu!* what a *coup de théâtre* if the lives of all here could be laid bare!"

"It would be a *coup* if done anywhere, Monsieur," suggested Frank demurely.

"I am no moralist," began the diplomate, with a magnanimous wave of the hand.

"We do not charge you, Monsieur," interrupted Vandorn blandly and with equal magnanimity.

"But," continued the Frenchman, "I believe in the illusions; without them, it would be a black-and-white world. Why is it that the court of the Emperor should be the Grand Pagoda of the Scarlet Sin?"

"The Emperor bears a good name," said Devereux. "He seems to have a character."

"What would you?" responded Danton. "The Emperor is the prisoner of circumstance.

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If you live in a glass house, you will be circumspect; if you live in a dungeon, you will be a saint. The Emperor is always in the glass case or the casemate. Two bands of spies watch every movement of his, — the Nihilists to kill, the Royal Guards to save. The Emperor is the slave of both. An autocrat, bah !

“ Well, *Vive la République!* ” said Vandorn with a laugh.

“ It is well,” replied the Frenchman with enthusiasm. “ We will have some more wine. The Czar certainly permits himself good wine.”

“ Monsieur,” said Frank when their glasses had been refilled, “ have you made the acquaintance of any of the Nihilists ? ”

“ Oh, yes.”

“ What sort of animals did you find them ? ”

“ I did not find them. They are here, there, everywhere. I know I have met many of them, but I could not say who they were.”

“ You think there are Nihilists here to-night ? ”

“ I do not doubt it. They disguise themselves sublimely. They go everywhere. They know everything. They have many disguises — more than you see uniforms here to-night.”

“ Gad ! ” said Vandorn, looking about cautiously, “ no wonder the government wants to suppress them.”

“ I have no patience with them ! ” said Dev-

The French Diplomate's Point of View.

ereux. "It is too absurd, their squandering so much courage and ingenuity in the interest of anarchy. It seems to me they would know that they could not hope to succeed permanently. It is the nightmare of sublime folly. They ought to know that the Czar, like the well-remembered Phoenix, never dies."

"You are mistaken, Mr. Devereux," said the Frenchman courteously; "Nihilism it is that cannot die. It will flourish when there is no such thing as a Czar."

"Naturally," said Devereux; "for when it does flourish there will be no Czar, no anything. There will be not even a Lord of Misrule."

"A clever play upon the word," said the Frenchman with a sceptical smile; "but, unfortunately for your view of the case, Nihilism does not mean that. You had once in your country what you called Know-Nothings. Did that mean ignoramuses?"

"By no means. Some people think they were wise men who came before their time."

"It is hardly polite to discuss the subject here, but I may say that annihilation is as far from being the doctrine of the Russian Nihilists, as ignorance was from being the chart of the Know-Nothings. But we are spoiling our wine with our seriousness. Let us drink to the purification of the Empire."

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As Frank Devereux made his last round of the brilliant scene that night he thought of the Frenchman's words. A galaxy of beautiful faces and exquisite forms passed before him. Were they but the rosy shadows of a moral Black Death? Around the Emperor and the Empress were the eminently respectable-looking "portrait ladies." Were they merely apparent signs of staid matronhood? And those courtly dignitaries, was it possible that a shameless fire burned in their veins? Devereux did not like to believe it, so near it came to obliterating the line between vice and virtue, and welding a link between depravity and beauty. Purity had no password there, if the Frenchman's view were the correct one. He preferred to think that there were many good wives and honest young women there; but it was somewhat appalling to realize how many side-lights there were on the Russian character; and this thought was prominently in his mind as he was making ready to depart that night from the palace.

CHAPTER III.

A CONFESSION BETWEEN THE ACTS.

WHEN Frank Devereux called at the residence of General Melnikoff the next evening, Valérie came into the parlor bundled up as if for an outing. He was astonished, but he greeted her without showing his surprise.

“Are you ready?” she said.

“For what?” he asked.

“To meet those to whom I promised last night to introduce you?”

“Oh, yes; I did not understand.”

“I must exact a promise of you. You are to tell no one where you have been, whom you meet, or what we may talk about.”

“I promise; but I do not understand the necessity for such precautions.”

“You have not studied the laws of our country?”

“No; I have given them no thought whatever, and am totally ignorant of them. I am not a lawyer, you know.”

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“Your eyes may be opened to-night,” she said quietly.

She saw his look of surprise, and with an explanatory gesture she continued, “I am not trying to mystify you. In one sense you will hear nothing that will astonish you, as you will simply fall in with half a dozen or more cultivated people who meet to talk about political and economical subjects. But I ought to tell you frankly that there is danger to ourselves even in these meetings, and if you would rather not go”—

“I will go with you anywhere,” said Devereux quickly, and with an unmistakable feeling in his tone.

They were standing in front of an open grate, up which a roaring fire flamed its way. She was drawing on her gloves. She paused, struck by his tone, and looked up in his face. Then she quietly gave him the little ungloved right hand, which he held in his for a moment as if it were a frail but priceless jewel.

“Yes,” he said; “you are incapable of doing anything that is wrong. I will go with you anywhere.”

He felt the little hand tremble in his own, like a captured bird, and then he could no longer restrain his speech: “Go with you? Yes; to Siberia, if you went thither.”

A Confession Between the Acts.

Her bosom heaved and fell with the intensity of her feeling. Her face grew pale, her hand cold. A look of fear came into her eyes. The expression baffled him.

“Pardon me,” he said contritely, “I have wounded you. I have been rude and sudden.”

“No ; it is not that,” she said, recovering her composure, and answering the tender concern in his eyes with a look of wonderful sweetness. “Your words were sudden. They evoked a great fear. But they have for me”—she faltered gently in her speech.

“What ?” he asked.

“A sweetness which you cannot guess,” she replied.

“Then you do not forbid me to love you ?”

“Forbid, indeed !” she said, smiling. “On the contrary, I command you to love me.”

“My little Czarina !” he said with effusive tenderness.

“But it is time to go,” she said with a charming imperiousness.

He was reluctant to set out, for he would rather have spent the evening alone with her, setting free all the tender things that crowded his heart, and learning from her some of the secrets which Love had enshrined in her bosom. But the engagement had been made, and it pressed upon them. So love for the time was

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deferred, though she, too, would have preferred to remain. It seemed almost a desecration to allow any other emotions that evening to encroach upon the prerogatives of the heart. Something, too, seemed to warn her not to go. She had a prescient feeling that her happiness might be endangered; but after a slight hesitation she looked into her lover's eyes and laughed it off, and they set out for the residence of the Countess Karmeloff.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MEETING OF THE REVOLUTIONISTS.

VALÉRIE and her companion walked along the Quay to a substantial-looking residence beyond the Liteinyi Bridge. They were gracefully received by the Countess Karmeloff and ushered into a reception-room — an apartment furnished with exemplary taste. Four or five persons were already present, and the young American was presented in turn to each, and was greeted with great friendliness by all save a tall, dark young man whom Frank recognized as the Hussar of the Guard, Ivan Valerianoff, although he was dressed in citizen's clothes.

The Countess Karmeloff was a motherly looking woman of some forty odd years, gentle and tactful in her manners, and with a face characterized by keen intelligence. She was not a handsome woman, but her bright eyes and winning smile made one soon forget the irregularity of her features. She was a woman

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of remarkable personal magnetism, and she made friends of all whom she desired to number among her friends by a certain prettiness of manner that was not easily resistible.

In an easy-chair near the fire, warming his delicate hands, was a young man with a high intellectual forehead, a face of mingled delicacy and power, and a manner most charming. He wore glasses, and his beard was trimmed with great nicety. One would have taken him for a professor, and such indeed he was. This was Adam Bogdanovitch, Professor of Sanscrit and Oriental languages in one of the first universities of Russia.

Sitting near the samovar, and superintending the production of the tea, without which no gathering in Russia would be complete, was a young woman of apparently twenty-five years. Her hair was worn short, as seemed eminently proper for a face so serious and resolute. Although her countenance was not entirely devoid of the dreaminess which makes the faces of Russian women so unique, one read in it rather a steadfast courage and evidence of unselfishness and intelligence. She was a handsome woman, but one thought more of her greatness than her beauty. This was Madame Paraveloff, the wife of the manly looking, good-natured doctor who stood near the fire opposite

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the Professor. Dr. Paraveloff was a very handsome specimen of physical manhood. He carried a large square head on his shoulders, which, if phrenology is to be trusted even cautiously, must have contained a brain in which perspicuity, will, and philanthropy were the dominant qualities. A strong and tender man, was Frank's summary of his character.

"Will Marcelle be here to-night?" asked the Professor.

"I expect him every moment," replied the Countess.

At the mention of the name of Marcelle Speranski every one present was evidently interested. And as they were mentioning his name, the door opened and Speranski appeared. He was greeted most effusively, and it was evident at once that he was the chief spirit of that little party.

Speranski was a man of probably thirty-five years. He was of medium height, and was sturdily built, quick in his movements, and conspicuously genial in his address. There was a royal pose to his head indicative of a daring nature. The dome of his head was high and round, creating the impression of a fulness of mental equipment. From under rather prominent eyebrows shone two bright, penetrating eyes, and somewhere in the beard, that covered his

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mouth and the lower part of his face, lurked a sly suspicion of humour. The effect of the man was breezy and inspiriting, and his coming changed the condition of those present at once; and whereas all had been rather silent and dreamy, now they were all animation and alertness.

“This is all I expected,” said the Countess, taking a seat near Devereux.

The object of the meeting then became apparent. It was simply conversation. To Devereux nothing could have seemed more innocent. In America such discussions would have provoked a smile; and but for the earnestness of the guests, the young American would have considered their conversation the veriest commonplace. Speranski, who was a natural orator, did most of the talking, generally setting up a topic to be discussed. He was a lawyer by profession, and it was easy for him to speak. On this occasion he entertained them by giving them a *résumé* of the proclaiming of the French Republic after the downfall of the Emperor Napoleon III., together with the rise and fall of the Commune. This topic opened up generally the views of those present regarding the purposes of the Russian crusade in the interest of a change of government.

“Should we ever be so lucky in this country

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as to strip the Czar of his power," said Sperranski, "it is not unlikely that there will be some such outbreak as that of the Commune; but we should make it distinctly understood that this spirit is no more ours than the spirit of the Commune was the spirit of the French Republic."

"I hope that Russian liberty will never have to answer for the birth of any such chicks as that," said the Doctor; "nor would it with fair and candid men. We Russians are not like the French. Every now and then the French select a cyclone to rule them, and there is the deuce to pay. We are not that way. When we have effected a peaceable revolution, and secured a parliament elected by the people, freedom of conscience, of speech, and of the press, and the authority of the Czar will be on a level with that of the English sovereign, I for one shall be thoroughly satisfied."

"I agree with you," said his wife, speaking in a clear and positive manner. "To aim at a republic in Russia would be madness. The people are uneducated, and they would not be satisfied with such a change. The illusion of power and ceremony must be retained until they are educated out of their narrow ideas, and the dignity of self-responsibility is established."

"My opinion is," said the Professor, "that a

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republic would be a good thing from the start, if it were practicable. I believe in taking a full plunge into freedom. But, unfortunately, my own belief runs ahead of the times. We know that there are thousands of men in the army who favor a curtailment of the privileges of the Czar who would not agree to the abrogation of that office entirely. Among the liberal professions we grow stronger every day. Even this morning I heard from a member of our faculty who would not be suspected of liberal sentiments, statements that would startle the ministry if they should become known."

"It is not that we are against the Czar or his office," said Valérie, "but we are simply contending for what belongs to us. Give us the making of the laws, and the privilege of thinking and speaking what we wish, and there would soon be an end of our party."

During all that had been said Valerianoff remained silent, and it was plain to see that he was displeased about something. Devereux was not a little puzzled over this meeting. He had heard nothing but platitudes regarding freedom and constitutional government, with which he had been familiar since he was a school-boy, and he could not account for the feeling of suppressed excitement that prevailed in the room. As the tea and Russian bon-bons

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were being handed around, he took occasion to say to the Countess, "I am told by Miss Melnikoff that meetings such as this are attended with danger. Will you tell me how this can be?"

"Let me ask you first," said the Countess, "whether you have heard anything very shocking here to-night, anything which you considered violent, subversive of order, damaging to mankind, or wrong in morals or in practice?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Yet every such meeting as this in Russia violates the criminal law," said the countess coolly.

"In what respect?" said Devereux, somewhat startled.

"If any one of us, for instance, should lay before the authorities all that has been said in these rooms to-night," she replied, "he could send the rest of us to Siberia. It is a violation of the law to talk about lopping off any of the powers of the Czar; and if it were suspected that we even desired to change the form of government at some remote period in the future, not even settled in our own minds, we would be liable to severe punishment."

"Then they punish people in this country before they violate the law," said Devereux with genuine American horror.

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“That is the truth. It is as if in your country you hanged a man whom you thought contemplated committing murder at some undecided time in the future, in order to prevent him from taking human life.”

“I never heard anything so extraordinary,” said Devereux; “but it is still more extraordinary that any people should stand it.”

“I shall have to admit that there is nothing so remarkable in modern life. There are many of us who are working quietly to bring about a change in existing conditions, but we labour under many disadvantages. We have to meet secretly. Under the law we are revolutionists and criminals, though we desire merely a constitutional monarchy. We cannot air our opinions in the papers. Public meetings are crimes; and we have no guaranty of trial by jury.”

“But I cannot see why one hundred million people should allow one man to treat them as so many slaves.”

“But,” said the Countess, “there are so many things in his favour. He holds the sword. The power of the church is with him. And there is, moreover, the power of public place. You can readily see that the growth of independence will be slow in an army dependent on the Czar. The army is nothing more than a great political organization, while the church

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is a vast political machine. It would astonish you to know how many offences can be committed against the church. For blasphemy, which may be simply a disrespectful allusion to one of the unnumbered saints of the church, you may be condemned to penal servitude for years, and sent to Siberia for life. The church is therefore but an arm of the Czar ; and by the force of the superstition which it creates, it keeps millions of the Czar's subjects loyal to him. Once embrace that superstition and you can never abandon it without committing a crime under the law. In every city and town the Imperial government, or the Czar, has his Chief of Police and his dozens of Imperial officers. They number hundreds of thousands in the Empire. All are creatures of the Czar. Personally they are usually rogues who steal and prey and oppress. They form the third great corporation which helps to perpetuate absolute power."

Speranski joined them at this point, and said in his fine, frank way, "Ah, Mr. Devereux, you ought to be a happy man ! You live in a country that is free. Here we are all the slaves of one man ; so much his slaves that every word I have said to-night about the government is treason. You see this book ?"

He had taken from the centre-table a small

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neatly bound book in English, and handed it to Devereux with the remark : “ You are somewhat familiar with its contents ? ”

“ ‘ The Ideals of the Republic ’ ? ” said Frank. “ I should not be a very good American if I were not. The Declaration of Independence, the Farewell Address of Washington, the Inaugural Address of Abraham Lincoln — these are indeed the ideals of our republic.”

“ Do you know what is the penalty for having in one’s possession this book, which contains some of the noblest sentiments ever penned ? ”

“ You don’t mean to say that it is a crime to have a copy of our Declaration of Independence ? ”

“ Such a book, if found in one’s possession, might be instrumental in sending one to Siberia.”

Devereux was stunned with astonishment. He could not realize that there was in any country in the nineteenth century such a despotism as that of Russia; and he was filled with admiration for these people, who, in the face of such tremendous odds, maintained a serene and tireless hope in the eventual triumph of Russian freedom. In the United States or in England these people would have been the honoured leaders of intellectual society. Here, for assuming to think, they were actually violators of the

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law — criminals in the eye of the Czar and of the people who had learned no better.

Finally Devereux found his tongue: "Under such a condition of affairs I do not wonder that the Nihilists exist. But your doctrine of peaceable revolution seems to me ridiculously inadequate for the case."

Speranski laughed as he said: "The Nihilists! I would give much to have your mental picture of a Nihilist. Wild eyes — is it not? — hair and beard spread out like the tail of a peacock, low brow, brutal face, filthy clothes — is that the idea?"

"You have certainly drawn him to the life."

"And his code is murder, atheism, and anarchy; he has a pirate heart, and he waves the black flag?"

"That has been my conception of him," said Devereux.

"Do we satisfy all the requirements of the picture?" asked Speranski with a smile.

"You? Why, of course not; but you" —

"Are Nihilists."

"Oh, no; you don't mean that?"

"I do. Every person here to-night is a Nihilist in the vocabulary of the Imperial authorities."

Devereux was strangely excited. He could not accustom himself to the idea, could not be-

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lieve it. Again Speranski smiled, and vouchsafed an explanation : " There is no difficulty about the matter at all. The Nihilist of popular fancy is a pure myth, a bogey of the Imperial government. I should be nearer the truth if I said that there are virtually no such persons in Russia as Nihilists. It is a term of opprobrium used by the Czar's tools to characterize those who favour any change in the form of government. It has an offensive sound, and I dare say when Americans hear the word they think as you do about it. This word has done more to check the cause of Russian freedom than a great army. The Czar knows it ; hence he calls all his opponents Nihilists. Among the thousands of us who are endeavouring to obtain a change of government, many diverse opinions are held. Some of us are timid and conservative ; some are radical ; a few are violent ; a few are communists, anarchists, or what you will. There are terrorists among us, usually men who have suffered intolerable wrongs at the hands of the government, and who believe it is better that one Czar should perish, than that ninety-nine innocent people should pay for their opinions with their lives. They see no hope in the policy of peace. The majority of us, however, trust that we shall be so strong some day that we can dispense with violence and war. These

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terrorists have been used by the Czar's minions as types of the revolutionists, and so we are all held up to the world as murderers, assassins, atheists, and anarchists. The word Nihilist indicts us before the civilized world ; and the explanation is somewhat lengthy, and moreover we have no way to defend ourselves, as our press is but another form of intellectual serfdom."

"Your peaceful revolution is very fine and noble," said Devereux, "but I don't think you'll be able to do much without fighting."

"Possibly ; and we are ready for that whenever it becomes necessary or advisable. Certainly if the Czar proposes to maintain his despotism by arms, by arms we shall be compelled to wrest our liberties from him."

A break occurring in the conversation at this point, the Countess proposed that they should have some music, and took her place at the piano. Madame Paraveloff rendered a Polish national song in a rich contralto voice resonant with mellow, magnetic notes. The aria was at first full of warlike patriotic ardour ; then the movement paused, and toward the *finale* a tearful melancholy sobbed through the piteous melody — it was the last sigh of a shattered people translated into music.

The Doctor performed on the flute, while the Professor executed some brilliant *fioriture* on

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the violin. Valérie sang with much grace and sympathy an exquisite aria from *Mephistoféle*; and Marcelle led the applause with the enthusiasm of a boy.

This evening recalled for Devereux the pictures of French society in the days just preceding the Revolution. These women, who were so in touch with the higher political aspirations of their country, brought before the American the recollection of those brave and brilliant women who did so much to fix in pure and deathless radiance the ideal of liberty in mad-cap France.

The party broke up with much good feeling. Ivan Valerianoff alone was cold and constrained. The look on his face was indefinably evil. He had throughout an evening of much conversation volunteered no opinions, nor had he spoken with Valérie. Once she caught a glance from his dark, unfriendly eyes, lighted with an inscrutable meaning, and she shuddered.

It was nearly midnight when Devereux with Valérie reached her home. The fire smouldered low on the hearth. It was hard for him to tear himself away; and they lingered a few minutes in the parlour exchanging confidences.

Just before parting he stood looking in her face with all the pride of a proud love. How beautiful she was! How noble and how brave!

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She was his, and he tried to assure himself that there was safety for her in his love ; yet somehow an intangible danger seemed to hover over her.

She, too, had a strange presentiment of ill.

Silently, even sadly, they looked into each other's face ; then he held her for a moment in his arms, kissed her, and hurried away, his heart torn by subtle fears that neither his reason nor his courage could banish.

CHAPTER V.

THE HAND OF THE CZAR FALLS.

THE next day Frank Devereux was occupied with official business which required his constant attendance in the Consul's office. This business was not satisfactorily concluded until ten o'clock that evening. It was an important matter, requiring the best judgment of Vandorn and the rarest diplomatic ability of Devereux ; and accordingly it threw the two friends together until they were ready to go to their beds.

In consequence of this diplomatic interlude Devereux was unable to visit Valérie until the following day. He was greatly troubled about her participation in the revolutionary movement ; and though he was in thorough sympathy with it, he determined that their marriage should take place as soon as he could induce Valérie to consent thereto. He was satisfied that no immediate danger threatened any of those who attended such meetings as that held

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at the residence of the Countess Karmeloff ; but the time would come when the entire revolutionary movement would have to avow itself and measure its strength with the supremacy of the Czar, with the army, the church, and the legions of tenacious officials. When that time came he felt assured that there would be a bloody war, and he was anxious to have Valérie in America when the storm burst in its fury. He had succeeded partially in banishing the strange fears that had assailed him when he had last parted from Valérie. They had largely fled in the sanity of the bright day ; and it was simply inconceivable to him that orderly and respectable men and women, and Valérie most of all, could ever be molested by the government. They were not the class of which vulgar criminals were made. They were enlightened people, peace-loving, liberty-desiring people, and they were certainly in no danger. Perhaps they liked to spice their harmless meetings with the thought of adjacent danger. It was an innocent delusion on their part. As for any actual peril, it was not possible.

It was with a light heart filled with pleasant dreams that Devereux entered the Melnikoff residence that night. How would his love look he wondered. What new grace would she be crowned with since he had parted with her two

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nights before? Love was busy with a thousand phantasies, when to his surprise General Melnikoff entered the parlour into which he had been ushered.

Devereux's first thought was that Valérie had informed her father of all that had passed between them; his second was that General Melnikoff was radically opposed to the marriage; his third was one of utter, hopeless bewilderment.

General Melnikoff looked ten years older than he had when Frank had seen him last. He was not in military costume. An unspeakable blight had fallen upon him and crushed his heart.

He was a tall, aristocratic-looking man, with white hair and moustache and a clean-shaven face. He had the gait of the true soldier, a bright, dauntless eye, a square jaw, a resolute presence. But now much of this soldierly vigour had disappeared, and left him a pitiful bundle of nerves. His eyes were bloodshot; care had seamed his face with its dark tracery; and he had evidently drank deeply of vodka to sustain himself. He sank heavily into a chair.

"You came to see Valérie?" he said huskily.

"Yes," said Devereux.

"Do you pretend not to know?" said the General, fixing his glittering eyes on the American's face.

"My God! Nothing has happened to her—

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she is not dead!" said Frank, pale with an apprehension of he knew not what.

"It is far worse than that," said the General wearily. "If she were dead, I should be happy."

"In the name of Heaven, General, what has happened to her? There is only one thing that can be worse than death."

"In most countries, yes; but you are in Russia. But why do you pretend not to know? Superb actor that you are, Mr. Devereux, you cannot deceive me."

"General Melnikoff," said Devereux with forced composure, "will you have done with riddles and tell me what has happened?"

"You have asked for Valérie. You will not find her here."

"Then where is she?"

"That I can only guess, though it is not hard to guess correctly. Last night a carriage with blinds drove up to the house, and three muffled *gens d'armes* leaped from it. Valérie was summoned by them to the door, and at once placed under arrest. Then the house was searched, her correspondence seized; and in her possession were found several such books as 'The Intellectual Development of Europe,' Buckle's 'History of Civilization,' and a 'Life of George Washington.' These were, in the estimation of such critics as the police, valuable evidence

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against her. She was permitted to communicate with no one. When the search had been concluded she was placed in the closed carriage and driven away. That can mean only one thing. She is now in the fortress of Petro-pavlovsk."

Devereux was speechless with conflicting emotions. He buried his face in his hands. He did not know the full significance of General Melnikoff's words, and it was hard for him to realize that any serious evil threatened Valérie.

General Melnikoff eyed him closely while he remained in a profound silence, and at length said, "Now that I have told you what has happened, I demand an explanation of you. Night before last you accompanied my daughter to the house of the Countess Karmeloff."

"I did," said Devereux vacantly.

"It was on account of her attending that meeting that she was arrested," said the General meaningly.

"I was a guest there at the invitation of your daughter," said Devereux.

"As I have been informed by the authorities, there were present at the meeting the Countess Karmeloff, Valérie, Doctor and Madame Paraveloff, Professor Adam Bogdanovitch, Marcelle Speranski the Attorney, Ivan Valerianoff, and yourself. Have I been correctly informed?"

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“Entirely so.”

“There was no one else ?”

“No one ; not even a servant.”

“What would you say if I told you that the entire conversation of that meeting had been reported in detail to the authorities ?”

“Simply that some one present had betrayed the meeting. No other inference is possible, unless the walls had ears.”

“Exactly the conclusion I have come to. Now, who of those present could have been base enough to lay the matter before the authorities ?”

Devereux studied for a moment, running over the list of those who had attended the meeting. “There is only one man who could have done it,” he said at length, “and that is Ivan Valerianoff. I would trust all the others as I would myself. But would it not be well to see some of them and question them ?”

“They have been arrested.”

“And Ivan Valerianoff ?”

“Ivan Valerianoff has been arrested too,” replied the General quietly. “In fact, there is only one person who was present at the house of the Countess who has not been arrested.”

As the General said this he looked sharply at Devereux for the confusion which betokens guilt. The American was startled unmistakably, for he realized for the first time that he was sus-

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pected of treachery. But he behaved himself not at all as General Melnikoff had anticipated. He did not become excited ; nor did he give any evidence of fear. He simply said, very directly and calmly, "Then you have come to the conclusion that I have betrayed your daughter and her friends to the police ?"

"No other conclusion is left me ; but before the matter goes any further, I wish to give you an opportunity to explain fully. I have lost all that life can give me, Mr. Devereux. My wife is dead. My only child is lost to me forever. My very activity in demanding information from the authorities as to the cause of her arrest has been resented and has subjected me to suspicion. The Czar has this day stripped me of my uniform, and I am henceforth a marked man. If there is any one man that has brought this shame upon me, — nay, dozen men, I should say, — I am determined to kill him or them, no matter what may be the consequences. If you are the betrayer, then your life is forfeit to me."

It was a severe test of the American's patience to hear such words as these. While his heart was racked with grief over the misfortune that had befallen the woman he loved, to be confronted with the charge that he had brought this trouble upon her was unspeakably humiliating ; but he held his emotions in check, his

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anger in abeyance ; and General Melnikoff met a pair of eyes as frank and fearless as his own when he looked in Devereux's face. In a quiet, positive tone the American responded to the old soldier's accusation :—

“ I cannot blame you, General, for harbouring some such suspicion as this, even though you are cruelly unjust to me. In the first place, however, let me ask you what possible object I could have in acting so basely? I am an American. I am a free man. I love liberty as I do life. I am, moreover, in entire sympathy with the Russian patriots. At the invitation of your daughter I went with her to meet some of the men and women who are working quietly for liberty. I did not know that it was a violation of the law, but that would not have deterred me from going. The reason I was not arrested should, it seems to me, have occurred to you. Your government dare not arrest an American citizen who chanced to be present at a *conversazione* of Revolutionists. Let me tell you everything. On the evening of that meeting I had told Valérie that I loved her, and, to my great delight, I found that she returned my affection. This was before the meeting. We returned from the meeting at half-past eleven o'clock on the evening of the 16th. At midnight exactly I left the house. I hailed a passing *izvoshchik*,

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and was driven to my hotel, where I found my comrade Vandorn, the American Consul here, awake, reading a novel. As I entered he remarked that it was a quarter-past twelve o'clock, and that he had read long enough. The next day we arose at nine o'clock, breakfasted together at ten, worked on an important diplomatic matter until nearly ten that night. We also lunched and dined together. At ten o'clock, fatigued with our constant occupation, we went to bed. I mention all these details to you because you are Valérie's father, and if you care to verify them you can consult Vandorn. You can very readily see that it would have been simply impossible for me to have lodged any information with the police. This is the truth on my honour as a man; and to show you that it is so, I propose to devote my life and fortune to securing Valérie's release."

There was conviction in Devereux's face, and the General waived his suspicions and said, "I believe you are telling the truth; but how could the conversation have been divulged?"

"The plot is doubtless deeper than you suppose, General. If I had given away the secrets of that meeting, and wished to avert suspicion from myself, I should have had myself placed under bogus arrest."

"There may be something in that."

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“Let us assume for the moment that Ivan Valerianoff is the possible traitor. What is your opinion of Ivan, General ?”

“Ivan is one of the most savage soldiers in the army. He has the soul of a Tartar. He takes every possible advantage of a foe. If he could, I think he would like to make war like a Zaporogian Cossack in the time of the Polish ascendancy. He’s a splendid soldier, but no one loves him. If thwarted in any of his desires, his vengeance knows no bounds.”

“Very well. Ivan and I have been rivals. On the night of the Czar’s ball he proposed to Valérie, and was rejected. He had reason to think that she loved some one else ; and I suspect that he looked upon me as his successful rival. His behaviour on the evening of the 16th was constrained and sullen. He did not speak to me. I am satisfied that he is at the bottom of this horrible revenge ; and I shall give some of my attention to Ivan as soon as I can come up with him.”

“He will make no scruple of killing you,” said the General.

“Possibly ; but I think I can take care of myself.”

“He is famous all over Russia as a pistol-shot.”

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“I can shoot a little myself, General. It is said we learn such things in Kentucky.”

“He is the best swordsman in the army.”

“I had a year at Heidelberg, and nobody there could scratch me.”

“You are young and full of hope, Devereux. I am old and stripped of all my honours. All that I ask now is revenge and death. I shall never have Valérie with me again. I feel it in my heart. God only knows how long she may be kept in the Fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul. She will be sent to Siberia. She will die on the way, or soon after she arrives there; for she is not coarse enough to stand that long drawn-out agony, the trip to the mines. O God, give me the life of the man who has brought this blight upon me and mine!”

A heavy silence intervened, during which the two men were bowed to earth in sorrow. At last Devereux roused himself and said, “I am going to follow her to Siberia, and free her, or die. But we must find some way to communicate with her. Can you not see her and let her know that we will move heaven and earth to set her free?”

“I could perhaps obtain permission to see her, but what good would it do? The interview would be held in the presence of two or more guards, and I should not be allowed to speak



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privately with her, or to touch upon any subject of a political nature. I should have to confine myself to purely formal and impersonal topics."

"Obtain this permission if you can, General, and I will see if there is not some way to communicate what we wish to her. We must keep her in hope, or she may die of despair."

"I will do as you say ; but I have no hope myself," said the General wearily.

Devereux would not admit to himself how completely disheartened he was over what had taken place. He tried to banish his depression by a restless activity. He sought in the papers for the details of the arrest ; but all that he could find was the simple statement that the police had discovered another elaborate Nihilist conspiracy, and that the guilty parties had been apprehended. The Czar did not edit all the papers in his Empire for pastime.

Communication must be had with Valérie in some way ; and Devereux divined that if he could make the acquaintance of some of the Revolutionists, they would be more likely to give him a plan than anybody else. He knew that Speranski was married, and he was aware that Professor Bogdanovitch had a brother who was a *tchinovnik*. It was not likely that the latter would sympathize with the revolutionary movement, and it was useless to hunt him up.

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If Madame Speranski had not been arrested also, it was probable that she was at least under police surveillance. For Devereux to call upon her was therefore to subject her to fresh suspicion. In this emergency he sought Vandorn, and laid the whole matter before him.

“This thing is horrible!” said Vandorn.

“I’ll not ask you to help me, Van, if you think it would compromise yourself or your position as an *attaché* of the United States.”

“See here, Frank, what have I ever done that you should think of me in that way? But let me ask you, what do you propose to do in this case?”

“I am going to rescue Valérie if there is any way to do it.”

“Suppose they send her to Siberia?”

“I shall follow her.”

Vandorn gave a groan. “What did we ever come to this cursed country for? Well, there’s nothing to do but give it all up.”

“Give up all what?”

“Oh, the programme I had arranged for New York.”

“I don’t see why you should do anything of the kind. You certainly don’t think I expect you to remain here and help me?”

“I don’t know what you expect, old fellow, but that’s what I’m going to do. It seems to

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me a quixotic undertaking to go to the ends of the earth for a woman ; but as long as you have made up your mind to go, why, I'll go with you."

"God bless you, old man !" said Frank with tears in his eyes ; " but I can't allow you to do anything of the sort."

" I haven't asked your permission yet, have I ? " asked Vandorn coolly. " I'm going to fight this thing through with you, Frank, and there's no occasion to say anything more about it. The battle is on, and it's Yankee Doodle against the Russian Empire. You say you want to talk with a Russian Nihilist. Well, Danton has discovered a nest of them. You wait at the Embassy, and I'll hook you a Nihilist in the course of two hours."

Vandorn's eyes were gleaming with excitement, and his usually inert body fairly quivered with the briskness of his movements. Here was a dangerous problem that appealed to him, that brightened his wits and aroused the war spirit in him ; for Van was as plucky a little fellow as ever lived — and he was a new man. He set forth at once to find his friend, the French diplomatist, with whom he had fraternized considerably of late ; and with the aid of that shrewd gentleman he had captured his Nihilist in a very short time, and carried him off to Devereux, with whom he was at once closeted.

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Frank found himself in company with a tall soldierly looking young fellow with blue eyes and a blond beard. He proved to be a young physician of German extraction by the name of Todleben, and in appearance he was not unlike Devereux himself. The American was very favourably impressed with the doctor, and soon satisfied himself that he could trust Todleben. Frank's plan was to find some of Speranski's friends, and consult with them as to the best way to communicate with Valérie and ascertain what were the government's intentions with regard to the prisoners. He told Todleben very frankly the circumstances of the meeting at the Countess Karmeloff's, as well as the suspicion that General Melnikoff had entertained toward himself. He did not lay before Todleben his entire programme, but his frankness was a point in his favour, and the Russian made an appointment with him for that evening after supper.

Promptly at eight o'clock they met near the Liteinyi Bridge, and set out toward the heart of the city. They finally turned into a rather secluded street, ascended a stairway leading from the sidewalk, entered a hall, and approached a door directly before them. Todleben made a carefully calculated number of light knocks on the door, which, as Devereux afterward learned, spelled the doctor's name. An an-

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swering series of knocks from the inside signified: —

“Alone?”

“With a trustworthy friend,” was Todleben’s response, and the door was promptly opened.

Devereux found himself in an anteroom, where he and his new acquaintance deposited their heavy coats, and then entered the main room, which was most elaborately and handsomely furnished. It contained a number of tables, around which were gathered little coteries of eager men conversing in low tones and playing cards in a mechanical manner. Devereux was indignant at what he saw, and turned upon his companion angrily. Todleben laughed.

“Wait!” he said. “You think I have brought you to a gambling hell. It is only the headquarters of the Revolutionary party. This great and good government does not object to our meeting for the purpose of gambling, but it makes it a crime for us to meet with the intention of discussing state affairs. Observe these men closely, and you will see that they are all talking among themselves, and that they are not interested in the cards. The servants are Kirghiz, who are too stupid to see the sham.”

It was as Todleben had said. Apparently no attention was paid to the new-comers, but every eye in the room had scanned them covertly.

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“Speranski’s particular friends — of whom I am one also — are gathered at the table at the head of the room,” said the doctor. “We will take a hand in the game there.”

Among those who were present, Devereux noticed a number of spectacled students and professors, and even a few uniforms. There was hardly an unintelligent face among them ; and save for the ostentatious gambling carried on, any visitor would have thought that he had merely entered a fashionable club-room. When Todleben and Devereux took their seats, warm drinks and cigars were ordered for all who were gathered there, and a lull ensued in the gambling. Before anything was told to Devereux he gave his word of honour not to betray their confidence or to reveal anything concerning the “club.”

“Mr. Devereux,” said Todleben, “desires to know what has become of those who were arrested, and if there is no objection I will tell him.”

“There is none.”

“They have all been incarcerated in the Petropavlovski Fortress. Each one of them has been placed in a bomb-proof casemate, secluded from the others, and cut off from communication with the outside world. They are permitted to see no one, to talk to no one. They are not

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allowed to read anything or write to anybody, or to know why they are imprisoned. When they are taken to their casemates they are stripped, and examined to see whether they have any papers or means of communication concealed in their ears, mouths, and so forth. Then they are given a prison uniform, and their own clothing is taken away. There is apparently no way to communicate with each other ; but the ingenuity of man has never been baffled by obstacles. I cannot reveal to you how this communication has been carried on. Speranski was arrested on the 16th, and already we have received a letter from him."

Here Todleben took from his pocket a thin piece of soiled linen, on which was written a cipher letter in red ink apparently — blood in reality. The doctor then read the letter, which was as follows : —

"I am in the Petropavlovski Fortress at last. Was arrested at ten o'clock P.M. of the 16th at home, when my wife was away on a visit. Valérie is in the casemate beneath me. I have been able to signal her, and have found her very much depressed. The Countess, the Doctor and his wife, and the Professor are here. Ivan Valerianoff is here also, but attempts to communicate with him have been thwarted by himself. I suspect him. Watch every carriage that comes from the fortress; follow it, and see if it does not disgorge Valerianoff. We are watched day and night, so closely that it seems they must see our

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thoughts. Devise some way, if it is possible, to locate the bastion in which we are imprisoned. If it is upon the river I could throw messages out upon the ice, where they could be found by friends."

To say that Devereux was astonished is to use a mild term. These men seemed to care nothing for bomb-proof walls and prison guards and the countless precautions of the police. He could not imagine how it was possible for that letter to have travelled from a dark, solitary cell into this brilliant club-room. Men who could accomplish such feats could doubtless suggest a device by which he might be enabled to communicate with Valérie. He saw that they could be trusted. They had freely admitted him to their confidence. He therefore admitted them to his. He told them of his engagement to Valérie, and of his determination to rescue her if it took the remainder of his life. They liked his spirit, and promised to join with him in a general plan to liberate their friends, when it was found what disposition was to be made of them. They approved of his idea of sending a message of his intention to Valérie, and suggested a plan by which it could be done.

As for rescuing any one from the Petropavlovski Fortress, Todleben soon convinced him that it was utterly impossible. If the prison authorities could be corrupted it might be done;

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but the soldiers who guarded the fortress were changed two or three times a day, and every officer was a watch upon every other. It was true that the Revolutionists had a great many friends among the soldiers ; indeed, many daring Nihilists had joined especially for the purpose of spreading the cause, and keeping abreast of the spirit of the army. Occasionally a Revolutionary *gens d'arme* or soldier watched in the castle, but there were dozens of other *gens d'armes* about, and it would be impossible for one friendly guard to help any prisoner to escape. There was, moreover, only one outlet from the bastion in which the prisoners were placed, and this outlet was always scrupulously guarded. No man had ever escaped from that dark fortress.

Devereux saw that it would be necessary to wait until the prisoners were exiled to Siberia, an event which might happen in a few months, or it might be not for several years. But in the meantime he could communicate with their friends at the club, and they promised to give him such news as they could get.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE FORTRESS.

A GREAT crowd of people were assembled on the island containing the fortress of Petropavlovsk. Thousands of persons were gathered on the frozen river, and even the Quay across the Neva was thronged with ladies and gentlemen holding lorgnettes and field-glasses in their hands. It was not a race upon the river that drew together this great concourse from every part of the city, but a dangerous and thrilling exploit, such as had been witnessed once years before, and was now about to be attempted again.

In the Petropavlovski Fortress stood the beautiful cathedral, whose golden spire seemed to penetrate the sky like an enchanted sword. It was four hundred feet high, and, as one looked up at it, its height was enough to make the senses reel. This slender shaft held up a golden globe on which an angel stood with uplifted cross. A part of this cross had decayed and

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fallen away, and a daring lineman had undertaken to mount the spire, climb over the globe, and repair the cross. The globe was twelve feet in circumference, and the highest window in the spire was a considerable distance below it.

Although apparently made of solid gold, the spire was covered with large sheets of copper, gilded, and these sheets were held on by large nails, over the heads of which the loop of a rope could be placed.

It was a beautiful day. The sun shone brightly on the fiery golden sword that cut the sky — shone on the glittering angel towering high above the crime-stained fortress — shone upon the broken cross, sign of love and hope and faith swaying over a perdition made by the hands of man.

At last there was a great cheer heard upon the banks of the Neva, and tens of thousands of eyes were fixed, with a fascination akin to that which held fierce Roman hearts before the sports of the arena, upon a tiny figure crawling out of a window over three hundred feet in air. The lineman was making ready for his exploit. Around his body he had wound a rope, and in his hands were two short cords looped at each end.

Carefully placing one of the loops over one of the projecting nails on the side of the spire,

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he inserted his right foot in the lower loop, and there he hung, his whole weight depending on a single nail — only that between the heavens and the death beneath. His next step was to place the upper loop of his other cord on a nail higher up on the left, and insert his left foot in the lower loop. Then he transferred his entire weight to the second rope, and moved the first one up a peg. And so he crawled painfully up the glittering spire, foot by foot, until he reached the globe.

Far below he could hear the applause swelling up from the banks of the river, which seemed to waver beneath him like a sheen of diamonds.

But the hardest task remained to be done. The brave heart did not despair, nor the cool head swim, even though the globe was perfectly smooth. Carefully he took the rope from around his body, tied one end of it around his waist, and with a quick, deft movement he managed to throw the other over the globe. It had a weight attached, and this caused it to wind around the foot of the angel, while the weighted end came back within the grasp of the lineman. He now slowly, but surely, dragged himself over the globe, until at last he stood beside the golden angel, swimming in the shifting sky.

A rope promptly let down to the window was seized by an assistant, who tied to it a

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rope-ladder, which was drawn up and securely fastened to the base of the angel, thus furnishing a ready mode of ascent or descent for the lineman to make the repairs of the cross.

And thus it was that Vassily Tadmorski the Nihilist obtained a complete plan of the fortress of Petropavlovsk. From the top of the cathedral he could see it all as a map, the exact situation of the various bastions, the boulevard, the canal, and the different courts ; and with the aid of a field-glass, which he had not neglected to carry with him, he discovered in one of the courts a prisoner pacing up and down between two *gens d'armes*, and he located therefrom the bastion in which the politicals were confined.

There were five bastions in the fortress ; and so careful had the authorities been in taking their prisoners to and from their place of imprisonment, that no one could tell just where the bastion of the politicals was. It was necessary for certain plans of communication which the Nihilists were endeavouring to establish with their brethren within the fortress, that the position of the bastion should be definitely ascertained ; and this day Vassily Tadmorski had accomplished the feat amid the plaudits of St. Petersburg.

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When Valérie Melnikoff was suddenly confronted by three *gens d'armes* on the evening of the 16th, her first inquiry of them was, "On what charge am I arrested?"

"We were instructed to arrest you, Madame," said the sergeant in command. "That is all we know."

"At whose instance has the arrest been made?"

"We know nothing."

"You will allow me to communicate with my father. He is now at his club, or the theatre. As he is a general in the army, his daughter ought to have the privilege of seeing him, in order that he may take some steps in her behalf."

"We were told to search for seditious letters and forbidden books, and to take you" —

"Where?"

The sergeant shrugged his shoulders for an answer.

"To Petropavlovsk?"

"Have you searched well?" said the sergeant, ignoring her question, and turning to the two *gens d'armes*, who had just returned with books and letters.

"We have."

"Madame, we are ready to go," said the sergeant with the emotion of a brazen image.

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Valérie saw that it was useless to ask any more questions. So she wrapped herself up well, and entered the carriage. The curtains were pulled down, and it was driven off. In half an hour they had crossed the bridge and passed through the portals of the fortress, under the spire of the cathedral, now a shaft of frosty silver in the wintry moonlight. When the curtains were drawn aside and Valérie was allowed to alight, she found herself in a courtyard of a pentagonal character. She was taken quickly into a corridor on which the cells opened, and one of the overseers' wives accompanied her to her casemate. Here she was required to disrobe and don the prison uniform ; and her fashionable Parisian shoes were exchanged for a pair of soft, noiseless slippers. All of her clothes were then taken away, and she was left alone.

The cell in which Valérie Melnikoff was imprisoned was a masonry-vaulted chamber or casemate formerly used for artillery. The walls and ceiling were of brick, and the floor of concrete. Just under the ceiling was a small aperture with double gratings and an iron sash, which could be opened to admit air. In the heavy door opposite was a small wicket, covered by a panel, which could be noiselessly raised from the outside, so as to allow the guard to look in at the prisoner, unobserved, at any time.

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The furniture of the room consisted of an iron bedstead and an iron table, both fastened into the masonry, so as to be immovable. A stationary washstand, a looking-glass, a commode, a tin cup, and an image of the Virgin Mary, were the only other objects in the room. It was heated from without, thus rendering it impossible for the prisoner to make any use of the fire for purposes of escape, suicide, or communication. Beyond this there was nothing in the cell but heavy odours, gloom, and unbroken silence.

Valérie threw herself upon her bed and wept bitterly. Her thoughts ran quickly over the incidents of the last few days, and the happiness that was almost within her grasp; and the attendant pain was almost greater than she could bear. Had she indeed lost her lover forever? or would he be true to his promise and follow her to Siberia? Hope whispered that he would be faithful unto Death, and with this thought she was somewhat comforted.

It was while lying upon the bed that she heard a light tapping, apparently upon the iron frame which her cheek was touching. At first she was not inclined to attribute any significance to it; but as it continued she became interested in it; and at last thought that she detected a method in it. Suddenly it flashed upon her that perhaps some one was endeavouring to send her a message;

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but where was he? She saw that the bed was attached to the wall. The tapping must therefore have come through the wall; and the bed was probably connected with a conductor of sound somewhere. If such were the case, she reasoned that by tapping on the iron framework she might answer the unknown. She did so; and immediately there was a responsive tap. Valérie, like all those who were interested in the Revolutionary movement, was familiar with the number alphabet by which prisoners who are denied communication were enabled to send messages to each other. If in any way they could convey numbers, either by motions, knocks, or objects, they could defy prison walls and watchful guards. The accompanying diagram will assist the reader in understanding the plan of communication:—

	1	2	3	4	5
1	A	B	C	D	E
2	F	G	H	I	J
3	K	L	M	N	O
4	P	Q	R	S	T
6	U	V	W	X	Z

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To indicate any letter in the alphabet, find out the number of the column in which it stands perpendicularly and horizontally. According to this system of telegraphy the letter A is in the first column perpendicular, and the first horizontal, and it would be represented by one knock, a pause, and a second knock.

“The Czar is great,” tapped the unknown.

“The people are greater,” responded Valérie, recognizing a Revolutionary formula.

“Who are you?”

“Valérie Melnikoff! You?”

“Marcelle Speranski.”

“Where are you?”

“In the casemate above you.”

Then followed a long interchange of thoughts, during which Speranski urged her to be of good cheer. He told her that, as was usual with him, he was prepared for arrest, and that he had definite plans for communicating with their friends, which he thought would be successful. About midnight the telegraphing ceased, and Valérie dropped into a troubled slumber.

While it was easy to communicate between the upper and the lower casemates, it was a more difficult feat to do this laterally, as there was no way to send the sound through the walls except by making a noise so loud as to attract the

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guards. But Speranski was not to be daunted. As he looked out of his window his eye encountered an outer wall, over the top of which he could barely get a glimpse of the blue sky. He made careful measurements of his room, noted how far the window was from each wall, and rightly judged that the casemates to the right and the left were *fac-similes* of his own. He was an excellent mathematician, and he set out to calculate at what angle and with what velocity he would have to eject a slight object from his window to make it fall in the window of one of the adjacent cells. This he determined to his satisfaction, and he at once proceeded to put his project into execution.

When Speranski had been stripped for examination, the guards had found on his neck a large inflamed boil, which appeared to give him untold pain. It was poulticed elaborately ; and it never aroused the suspicion of the guards. Those thorough individuals looked in his hair, his ears, and his mouth, even going so far as to examine his teeth, to see whether anything was concealed in a hollow molar. But they did not pry into the boil, nor did they examine the soles of his feet, except in the most casual manner.

Now, that boil was a very clever invention of Speranski's, and it contained under its artistically

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painted surface — a marvel of success in still life — the small blade of a knife, a needle, and a roll of thread.

The morning after his incarceration Speranski asked permission to have a pipe, and, as he had money with the overseer, he was accorded the privilege. He expressed his preference for a cheap clay pipe with a plain cane stem, and he specified the brand of tobacco he preferred. These were brought to him after a while, and he proceeded to fill the cell with clouds of tobacco smoke.

Glued to the bottom of Speranski's feet were two pieces of almost transparent linen, which resembled flesh so closely that it would have been impossible to detect their presence except by the touch, or by examination in a strong light. One of these he had washed off that morning, and concealed beneath the lining of his slippers. Writing on a part of it with blood pricked from his skin, and using the needle as a pen, he neatly made a tiny pill of it just large enough to go in his pipe-stem, and coated it with tin-foil taken from his package of smoking tobacco ; then separating the stem from the pipe, he practised blowing with it against the wall and noting the rebound. When he was satisfied with his skill, he mounted his commode box and opened the window. It was a trying moment, and just

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then the guard opened the door and looked in to ask what he was doing.

Speranski explained that the smoke was rather dense, and he was letting it out. The guard retired satisfied, and the prisoner quickly blew his wad out of the window, and fancied he heard it plunk against the window of the cell next to him ; and as the window was in a sort of tunnel he had strong hopes that it had lodged where his fellow-prisoner could get it.

He waited long for some intimation that his message had sped to its mark and been received. How it would be answered he could not guess, but he kept his eyes and ears open.

At last the flash of a faint rosy ray on the outside wall attracted his attention. It came and went, and he soon perceived that there was an intelligence guiding it. He set his wits to work. Evidently those flashes came from some brilliant object, such as a mirror. It was not reflected sunlight, for a very conclusive reason, — no sunlight ever entered those gloomy walls to be reflected. Besides, it was too softened and dim for that : it was faint and delicate as a waning blush. If not done with sunlight then it was done with fire. The solution came to him like a flash. It was made by fire from a pipe or a cigar reflected in a mirror and thrown against the wall. He refilled his own pipe, took down

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his little mirror, and prepared to answer. First numbering the rays flashed on the wall, he found that by the number alphabet they spelled the word "salutation" several times, for the evident purpose of attracting Speranski's attention.

He held his glowing pipe to his mirror, and every whiff he took flashed a rosy beam upon the wall. So by numbered flashes he managed to cable to his so far unknown friend the words, "I understand."

"Your letter received," was the answering cablegram.

"Who are you?" asked Speranski.

"Paraveloff," was the reply.

And so these ingenious people in one way or another baffled the thousand precautions taken against them, and by nightfall all those who had attended the meeting at the residence of the Countess, except Ivan Valerianoff, were in comparatively facile communication with each other.

At noon that day the soldier guards had been changed, and the guard who visited Speranski's cell proved to be a patriot. He would be on duty there only a few hours, and the political prisoner took advantage of the opportunity to write the letter which we have already seen, and entrusted it to the friendly soldier to deliver. *Speranski also gave him a number of verbal*

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messages to deliver, but these were necessarily brief, for there were half a dozen other guards promenading that corridor, and a friendly guard had to be as much on the alert as a prisoner.

Several days passed, and Speranski received word from another friendly soldier who was serving his two or three hours as a guard in the fortress, that by the daring of Vassily Tadmorski the bastion had been located. He at once seized the opportunity to send back word through this soldier as to the exact location of his cell and the number of it.

Thereafter regularly at a specified hour a Nihilist skated on the river near the bastion, and managed to look out for Speranski's little pills containing information.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BOUQUET.

A MONTH passed, and the imprisoned politicals had received no intimation whatever of the course the government intended pursuing toward them. They asked for the charges that had been lodged against them. They received no answer. They requested the services of an attorney. They were denied this right.

They were forbidden to speak except in whispers, and then only when absolutely necessary. If they spoke when it was not necessary, their reasonable requests thereafter were ignored.

Their petition for something to read was also denied ; and so they spent the time pacing in silence their gloomy cells, or communicating laboriously with each other. Valérie was already very much depressed over her imprisonment, and she had almost made up her mind that her life was virtually ended. She had measured her puny strength against a soulless,

The Bouquet.

absolute power, and she was now in the grasp of the minotaur. In addition to being deprived of speech and of liberty, she had been torn away from her father, and she had lost Devereux forever ; for though he might not be willing to give her up, what could he do ? The moment he undertook to help her, that moment the mailed hand of the tyrant would come down upon him and crush him too.

It was while in the midst of these despairing thoughts that a guard entered her cell and informed her that her father had gained permission from the authorities to see her. This brightened her up instantly ; but the guard told her that she must be very circumspect in her language, or the privilege would never be granted again. She was not to say anything about her case, her life in the fortress, or her arrest. She was not to speak about politics, and she was to attempt to make no clandestine communication with her father. These restrictions dashed Valérie's hopes to the ground ; and when she was permitted to see her father in the presence of three soldiers, one of whom made notes of anything in the conversation which attracted his attention, she was under so much restraint, and he was so broken down with sorrow, that the interview was painful in the extreme. General Melnikoff had brought with him a large bouquet,

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which he asked permission of the guards to leave with his daughter. The officer of whom he made the request directly, took the bouquet rather ill-humouredly, and said, "How do I know that there is not something hidden in this thing?"

"Examine it, sir," said the General, "and you will find that it contains nothing but flowers."

The officer peered into it carelessly, and then he looked at Valérie's face, full of a woman's yearning for the bright flowers. He was but human after all, and such a beautiful face he had never seen before.

"Here, take the bouquet," he said gruffly, "there's no order against it."

Valérie's face expressed her gratitude eloquently, and the General, rendering courteous thanks, sadly took his departure.

When Valérie returned to her cell with those bright flowers — the only beautiful things that her eye had rested on for more than a month — she broke into tears of joy. She smelled them, she kissed them, she held them fondly to her bosom. So unrestrained were her emotions that she did not dream that these beautiful messengers of love and peace might contain a more definite message. This idea was suggested to her, however, by the presence conspicuously in the bouquet's centre of a peerless white rose.

The Bouquet.

Her heart gave a great bound, for the white rose was the chosen badge of the little Revolutionary coterie to which she belonged, and whenever sent by one of their number to another, it was a salutation equivalent to "Be on your guard," or "Open your eyes."

And Valérie did open her eyes. She forthwith unwound the silver leaf from the stem of the bouquet, and the first thing that attracted her attention was that it was made up of separate bunches of flowers, tied with thread. She accordingly took the bouquet to pieces, and perceived that there was a method in the tying of the various bunches. Around one bunch the thread was wound once, around another a great many times. And by observing them carefully Valérie saw that the little bunches were numbered in this way, running from one up to twenty-five. Evidently this was the order in which they were to be considered. So she took up the first bunch, and found therein a green leaf which was full of perforations. First there were four dots and one, signifying *d*; then five and one, or *e*; one and one, or *a*; and three and four, or *r*: then she continued until she had spelled out "Dear Valérie." This was all she found in the first bunch. In the second were two leaves which were numbered with dots, and on these she made out the beginning of a letter.

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Where there was more than one leaf utilized they were numbered so that it was easy to follow out the design of the writer. Valérie hurried eagerly from bunch to bunch, from leaf to leaf, and at last from the bouquet she spelled out the following message :—

DEAR VALERIE, — For more than a month I have tried to get some way to communicate with you, and now that your father has obtained permission from the authorities to see you, I trust this bouquet, with the message inside, may reach you. When I told you that I would go with you even to Siberia, I had no idea that such a horror as that fearful trip could ever befall you, but I send this bouquet to you to tell you that I meant exactly what I said. I am told that it is utterly impossible to devise any means of escape from the fortress, and that I must wait until your case has been passed upon and you have been sent to exile. The plan then to be pursued will of course depend upon the nature of your sentence. But, no matter how difficult the task, I shall undertake the rescue. It may require years. I will not fail you if it takes a life-time. Be on the lookout always, for you shall hear from me whenever it is possible, without danger to yourself. It is probable that I may have to take a trip to America before anything can be done. The programme I have in my mind is a very elaborate one. It is the conception of Vandorn and myself, and if it fails, it will not be for lack of energy or resources. Do not allow yourself to grow despondent, no matter what misfortune befalls you. Speranski has found a way to communicate with his friends. If you have any message to send to me, send it through him. My leaves are nearly exhausted, and on this last one let me inscribe my love.

DEVEREUX.

The Bouquet.

To one who, like Valérie, had been kept for several weeks in a gloomy casemate, with no associates, books, or letters, this message was an indescribable boon. It brightened her up as nothing else could have done, for it assured her of the correctness of her faith in Devereux, and the perfect sincerity and nobility of his love. She shed tears of joy at the thought that her trust had not been misplaced, and her heart beat high with hope again. She knew that great perils and troubles were before her, and that Devereux had assumed an almost impossible task, but she made up her mind never to give way to despair ; and during the months of her silent incarceration in the fortress she never did. She grew weak and sad, but hope never deserted her heart.

At last came to her and her friends the rumour that their cases had been examined and passed upon. The rumour was soon confirmed. Without hearing a particle of evidence openly, or giving them a chance to rebut any of this occult testimony ; without allowing them an opportunity to know what they were accused of ; without allowing them in short any kind of trial at all, the Czar banished them all to the mines of Kara by administrative process.

The terrors of that long, desolate, and deadly journey were known to them ; but they wel-

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comed it as a relief from the gloomy, soul-deadening life they were leading in those horrible dungeons. Anything was better than living thus, with never the sound of a human voice to delight the ear ; and so those unfortunate children of freedom, whose only crime lay in their self-sacrifice and in their opposition to a form of government utterly repugnant to justice and hateful in the sight of God, began the dreadful journey over the great Siberian steppes, knowing that Death would, in all likelihood, claim some of them before the journey was ended, and that their most cherished dreams of freedom would fade away forever in the lazaret, the madhouse, or the snowy wilderness that holds inshrined the hell of Kara.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TWO AMERICANS.

DEVEREUX and Vandorn did not hear of the departure of the exiles until it had taken place. They had waited several months in St. Petersburg as patiently as they could for this to occur. Their official positions had been surrendered some time before, and the days had passed irksomely enough ; for they had no heart for any sort of pleasure, and they were compelled to be very scrupulous in their intercourse with their Nihilist friends, lest they themselves should come under the suspicion of the government, and thus impede the execution of their plans.

It was with clashing emotions that they heard of the commencement of the Siberian journey. They were glad that their period of inactivity had come to an end, and they were filled with gloomy forebodings at the thought of the ordeal through which Valérie must pass before

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they should be able to render effective assistance.

During their enforced idleness they had never seen Ivan Valerianoff, nor had they been able to learn anything about him ; but now it became obvious that his arrest was a sham. The government had kept him secluded from public view, and then restored him quietly to his old place in the army.

The day after the departure for Siberia the two Americans went again over their plans. They knew it would take the exiles several months to reach the mines ; and this would give time for a return to America and the completion of such arrangements as were necessary for their undertaking.

They had decided in a general way to attempt the rescue at the mines of Kara, and then to make their way through Siberia to the Pacific Ocean. Runaways from Kara had been known to reach the ocean without money, or any other aid except their courage, their legs, and their plausibility.

“They have always been rearrested, it is true,” said Devereux ; “but that was because it was impossible for them to conceal the fact that they were runaways. Some of those plucky fellows, if they had had a few kopecks in their pockets, might have escaped. We will go pre-

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pared for every emergency—ready to bribe, to beg, or to fight; and if once we reach the Pacific, I have no fear that we shall fail to run across an American vessel and make our way back to the United States."

"By the way," suggested Vandorn, "there are a good many vessels that run from Tacoma and Seattle on Puget Sound up to Alaska and across to Siberia, trading at the Russian towns along the coast. What is to prevent our seeing the skipper of one of these vessels on the Sound, and hiring him for a round sum to keep his eye open for us?"

"The very thing, if we can find such a man."

"As I understand it, there are a good many representatives of the government in the sea-port towns of Siberia, and they will, of course, keep up a watch for us. So unless we shall have arranged passage on some ship in advance, it is not going to be an easy matter to catch up with an American skipper before the Russians catch up with us."

"You are right. We will have to go West and see about that."

"What are we to do about Miss Melnikoff's friends?"

"There's nothing to do but to aid the whole party. We depend on some of Speranski's friends to help us. Turn about is fair play."

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“By Jove!” said Van hotly, “I’d turn loose every mother’s son at the mines if I had my way.”

“The job is big enough as it is,” said Devreux with a smile.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LONG JOURNEY.

ON the 2d of May the little party of patriots in whose fortunes we have been interested, were brought together for the first time since their arrest. Perhaps no one of them realized how much he had changed until he read the measure of it in the shocked faces of his friends. It was a joyless reunion. The face of the Countess was pallid, and she was greatly reduced in body. Madame Paraveloff, so full of lofty resolution when in good health, was pitifully broken. She was thin and ghastly. Her eyes shone preternaturally bright in her emaciated face, and a hacking cough betrayed the first approaches of consumption. She was barely able to walk.

The colour had all gone from Valérie's cheeks, and she looked like one who had been through a long illness.

The Doctor's strength was not materially impaired, but he was suffering from scurvy,

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brought on by the inferior food on which he had been compelled to subsist.

Professor Bogdanovitch was a mere shadow of himself, and there was in his eyes the most dangerous of all lights, — the first symptom of insanity. He was half oblivious of what passed about him.

The steadfastness of Speranski's character was never more convincingly shown than at this point in their lives. Disease had worn him down too, but his bright eye flashed with indomitable resolve ; and in endeavouring to tone up the spirits of the others he forgot himself. His wife had wished to accompany him to Siberia, but he had persuaded her not to do so, as he hoped to escape, and her presence might impede his plans. It was arranged that she should go to Switzerland, where she had friends, and remain until she heard from him.

If the reunion of these friends was sad, how is it possible to depict the grief they experienced when they bade a last farewell to home and relatives and friends ? The parting between Valérie and her father was heartrending to all who were present; but she did not know until many weary weeks afterward, when she had become dulled and callous to suffering, and looked upon Death as a lover, that her father had gone from her to his shattered home not

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far from the palace of the Czar, and had there sent a bullet through his brain.

The little party of exiles were taken to the railway station, where they were placed in a car especially designed for prisoners. All were dressed in the somber grey uniform of convicts, and had with them the small bundles containing a few clothes and other articles which the government allowed them for their long journey. Having been convicted, they were now under no further restrictions of speech, and they were allowed to talk freely with each other. At first they were too heart-heavy to speak much, but Speranski was tireless in arousing their hopes and spirits. He even regaled them with humorous anecdotes ; and at last he had the satisfaction of seeing something like cheerfulness return to their faces, and he was content.

The railroad journey lasted for several days. They crossed the Volga River on the southward route to Moscow ; thence they proceeded in a south-eastern direction to the fair city of Nishni-Novgorod ; thence in the same direction to the Tartar city of Kazan ; eastward to Perm ; thence to the Urals, which they crossed at Ekaterineburg, and they were in Siberia.

Here began the great Siberian Road, which ran eastward three thousand miles, extending to the Amur River, which emptied into the Pa-

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cific ocean ; and here began the real hardships of the exiles. Before they reached the Urals, they had been merged into a large company of common criminals, men and women, of the various nationalities of Russia, who had committed all sorts of crimes. These convicts were, moreover, of the lowest, most abandoned classes. Their faces were brutal, their speech obscene. Many of them were dangerously diseased. But from this time on they were the companions of those refined and educated men and women who had committed the red Russian crime of free thought and free speech. Thus Valérie Melnikoff, the Countess Karmeloff, and Madame Paraveloff, women used to every refinement, whose lives were as pure as those of Virginia and Cornelia, found themselves the companions of abandoned harlots and women criminals of various kinds ; while the professor in one of the leading universities of Russia, the eloquent lawyer, and the honest physician enjoyed the society of murderers and the worst of Russian scum.

On the Siberian side of the Urals the convoy was formed, and the great tramp began. Some of the exiles being old and infirm were provided with seats in telegas, hard, uncomfortable vehicles, which became after a few hours of riding almost unbearable. At times the political pris-

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oners were allowed to ride, but for the most part they were required to walk like the rest.

The way lay through "Catherine's Alley," a road from Ekaterineburg to Tiumen, bordered with rows of silver birches, whose boughs interlacing above made an agreeable shade. But for this they would have suffered much from the heat, which, like everything else in Siberia, is extreme. The air was remarkably pure, and the sky was as clear as that of Colorado. Thousands of birds of brilliant plumage twittered amid the silver foliage. The rolling plains that stretched away apparently into the soft folds of the sky, unbroken at times for hours, were a wilderness of flowers. Great billows of forget-me-nots, alternating with waving surges of eg- lantine and buttercups, crowded both sides of the road; and occasionally over some lonely house on the steppe a Tartar honeysuckle climbed in dense profusion, and flung its bannered blossoms to the breeze.

Thus the steppe was robbed of its terrors, and the poor exiles, who had been living in dreary dungeons for months, fancied that they had come upon paradise by mistake. And what a glorious sight it was when they passed a forest of wild cherry-trees with blossoms thick as drifted snow!

The first day's experience, save for the occa-

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sional exhibition of brutality on the part of the Cossack soldiers toward the children and the laggards who were out of line, was not unpleasant; but that night when they made their first acquaintance with a wayside prison-house in the shape of a *poloo-etape*, all thoughts of an agreeable journey faded from their minds.

The *etape* is ordinarily a dirty wooden barrack having a palisaded court in the rear. It is the realised dream of a material hell.

It is divided into several compartments, which know neither ventilation nor cleanliness. In each of these compartments, or *kameras*, is a wide wooden bench, on which the prisoners sleep. All the nauseating vermin that flourish in filth infest these places; and the atmosphere of an *etape* is as wholesome as the breath of a sewer spiced with the germs of disease and every nomad foulness.

When Valérie Melnikoff entered the apartment reserved for the women she fell almost in a swoon. What foul and hideous death was this which seemed to impregnate every vein in her body and besmirch all her senses?

The Countess and Madame Paraveloff were hardly less sensitively affected. But all had provided themselves with small vinaigrettes filled with salts, and by the use of these they managed

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finally to accustom themselves to the unspeakable noisomeness of the place.

They were required to sleep on hard benches, without pillows or coverings of any kind ; and accordingly the three women passed their first night in an *etape*, side by side with mothers who had strangled their infants, women saturated with disease, and women who had lived the hard lives of thieves and Magdalenes.

Most of the men, on reaching the station and eating their evening meal, repaired to the *maidan*, an itinerant compartment used as a gambling hell.

The *markitant*, or keeper of the den, was a villainous-looking prisoner, who had purchased his post by bidding higher for it than any one else ; and he was soon thereafter reaping a small fortune in the way of coins, clothing, and various trifles. Around his table were gathered as excited a group of gamblers as ever fluttered about the gilded hells of Monte Carlo. The vice of gambling is too deeply planted in the Russian nature not to prevail among a lot of prisoners who are deprived of all other kinds of amusement. To those grimy, hard-featured fellows gathered about the flickering lamplight, gambling was the only pleasure in their darkened lives.

Speranski and his friends looked on at this curious scene for a while, and then retired to

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their cell. Their minds were full of plans of escape. One of them proposed exchanging names with some of the criminal exiles, and making a break for liberty ; but the plan was rejected out of loyalty to their women compatriots, as it would be practically impossible for them in their weak state to escape. There seemed no alternative but to await some lucky opportunity, or to rely on their friends, who had promised to leave nothing undone to aid them in escaping.

The next day they resumed the march with heavy hearts. The bright beauty of the flowers seemed to mock them.

It was the same story now every day. They plodded along the road tired, footsore, and heart-broken day after day ; and night after night they were locked up in the pestilential *etapes*. These seemed to gather additional foulness as they went onward.

After several weary days such as these they reached a dark forest near Tiumen. Here the road became miry and almost impassable, but the convoy kept on through the mud. The heavy hand of the Cossack fell on any one who lingered. And another torture was added here, — clouds of mosquitoes of intolerable fierceness assailed them, and feasted on their faces until their countenances resembled raw beef.

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At Tiumen they were placed in the common prison to rest. The gaoler at this place was a highly developed barbarian of the satanic stripe. His name was Madorog. Where he got his name nobody could have told. It was probably invented for him. His face was the open repository of nearly every conceivable evil passion. He had a pallid, unhealthy-looking complexion; and while one of his eyes had been put out, the other emitted a light sufficiently malignant for two. The head of a murderer, the mouth of a beast, and the furtive eye of a thief, were the prevailing characteristics of this guardian of dangerous and untrustworthy persons like Valérie Melnikoff, Loukeria Paraveloff, and the Countess. More than one woman placed under his care for keeping had been the object of his unholy desires; but so swift and terrible was his punishment of all those who made any complaint of his treatment, that he had reduced everything to order in his establishment. The tortured man dared not complain for fear of additional torture. The insulted woman was even more helpless, for a complaint might mean to her death, or something worse.

Dr. Paraveloff had a taste of this official's quality soon after he arrived at the Tiumen prison. Madorog's evil eye had no sooner fallen on Valérie and Loukeria than he began to

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bestow upon them his vulgar compliments. He spoke of providing them with extra accommodations in the prison, better food and service, and he complimented grossly their pretty faces.

“Cowardly dog!” said Dr. Paraveloff, who was standing near by, “say but another word to these ladies and I’ll choke you to death.”

Madorog laughed at the same time that a vengeful look came into his eye, while he drew his revolver.

“You are a coward,” said the Doctor, looking him boldly in the eye. “Here you know these women are defenceless. You are as large as I am, and you are much stronger, but when confronted with a man you must draw your revolver, and look around for help. You may kill me for calling you a base and cowardly cur, but if you do, the whole empire will not be big enough to conceal you from the vengeance of my friends.”

Madorog did not reply to this, but he called two of his underlings and said to them, “Here is some sport for us. This Nihilist threatens to kill me. Take him into the courtyard, tie him, and get your rods ready. I will be there in a minute to see that you do your work well.”

The doctor was accordingly seized, while Valérie and Loukeria went in tears to their apartment. The directions of Madorog were

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carefully followed, and in a few minutes he himself came out, lighted his pipe, took a seat, and prepared to enjoy himself. A cruel scourging followed, but the Doctor never gave the slightest intimation that he was in pain. Not a cry escaped him, and his face remained fixed even while the cruelly tortured flesh quivered instinctively under the masterful blows.

“I suppose that will do,” said Madorog at length, serenely curling little whorls of tobacco-smoke in the air. “You may now place him in the black-hole.”

The thongs were cut from the Doctor’s body, and he fell in a faint to the ground. His back was literally covered with blood.

“He is shamming,” said Madorog; “give him a few more.”

“He is not shamming,” said one of the underlings, whose expert testimony on such a subject was of course unimpeachable.

“Then throw him in the hole and let him come to.”

The insensible, bleeding form of the political exile was lifted up, and carried down into a damp, cold hole in the ground, into which no ray of sunlight ever penetrated. There he was thrown like a dead dog.

In the clutches of this tireless brute, Madorog, the six politicals remained for a week, when

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they were, with hundreds of common criminals, packed into a barge, especially built for the purpose of transporting exiles from Tiumen to Tomsk, a distance of two thousand miles on the river Irtish. It boasted nearly all the predominant foulnesses that characterized the *étapes*, with some special abominations of its own. To add to all this, their allowance of food was hardly sufficient to sustain life; and thus the tortures of hunger supplemented the unwholesomeness of their food and the numberless ills with which they were surrounded.

By the time they had arrived at Tomsk, the vacant stare in the eyes of Adam Bogdanovitch had deepened, and he would sit for hours in a sort of dense, oblivious silence. He would pay not the slightest attention to what was going on about him. The Doctor had not yet recovered from the flogging to which he had been subjected, and there was a hardness in his face never seen before.

To his wife he displayed ever an effusive tenderness. Only too surely he detected the coming of death in her face, but he never allowed her to see what he knew. But when her face was turned away from him, and his mind went back to the time when she was as fair as a dream, and when life had held so much for them both, the bitterness of murder filled his heart at

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the contrast between then and now. But the hard look in the Doctor's eye meant that any doubt he had hitherto had as to the advisability of violence was gone forever. A peaceful citizen of Russia had been by the pure force of circumstances transformed into a terrorist.

The Countess was no longer of a matronly plumpness. She had lost thirty or forty pounds. Her cheeks were sunken. Dark rings surrounded her lack-lustre eyes.

Speranski was the one hope of the party. Worn down in body, pale and emaciated from insufficient and unwholesome food, and depressed to his very soul, he never allowed his spirits to flag in the presence of his friends. His inventiveness was never idle, and no day passed without his contriving something in which to interest them and make them forget their hideous surroundings. This was not the heroism of battle, by which men are led in a spell of enthusiasm to forget danger and hurl themselves in the face of death; but a fortitude inborn, fighting its way inch by inch against the foes of ignominy, disease, and degradation, keeping the soul pure and steadfast in the face of greater discouragements than death, and spurred on by no radiant notes of fife or drum.

CHAPTER X.

THE ARRIVAL AT KARA.

EVERY day laid a heavier burden upon the soul of Valérie Melnikoff. During the earlier part of the journey she had not been without hope that Devereux would in some miraculous way effect her escape from the convoy. She never ceased to look for him. She could not guess how he would come. It might be in the disguise of a soldier or a convict; it might be that he would come under the cover of the blackness and stillness of night. He had given her no insight into his plans, and so she could only wait and hope.

After her first night in an *etape*, doubt began to assail her. She even became bitter against Devereux. Had he loved her, would he have ever allowed her to be exposed to such an experience?

The Countess, to whom she communicated her fears, endeavoured to reassure her.

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“My dear,” she said, “you are not just to him. How could he know what we have had to suffer on this journey? and if he had, how could he have relieved you? To attempt to rescue you from the soldiers on the road would have been madness.”

“But I have heard nothing from him at all.”

“How could you? He may not even have heard of your departure.”

Valérie was persuaded that she had done wrong to doubt; but life became darker and drearier as the days passed. Misery was heaped upon misery. If Devereux were coming, it seemed to her that he should have come long ago. Time was slipping by, and she was drawing nearer and nearer to the desolate mines of Kara, in the hollow of the frozen hills. And doubts began to cluster around her.

Her beauty too was fading. There was no longer a delicate bloom in her cheeks. Her features were pinched and almost hard. Her eyes had lost their softness, and now shone with an uncanny lustre. The delicate curves had gone from her figure, leaving her thin and weak. A heavy horror filled her soul. Would his love for her not die when he saw her? She had grown hateful to her own sight. Would she not be hateful to his?

This feeling dominated her for days; and

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while this despair was on her she had only one hope. It was that he would never come, and that she would be spared the crushing pain of reading the dismay and disgust written in his face when he beheld her.

Then followed days of feverish longing to see him. She assured herself that she would retain his love. She would regain her beauty in the sunshine of his affection. By a thousand winning ways she would bind his heart to hers, and by the sheer force of a great resolve she would have love for love.

But Devereux came not. No message from him ever penetrated the murky atmosphere of the prisons. No vision of him ever came to her across the burning steppes. At every town which she entered she hoped to see him among the people gathered to express in their faces the sympathy they felt for the poor exiles ; but she never did ; and it was with ever-deepening disappointment that she would turn from the kindly townspeople and enter the walls of the prison.

At last the conviction settled upon her that it were as well to abandon all hope. Across the gap of years her thoughts flew to the gentle-faced mother who had been so tender of her. It was indeed a blessing that she had gone to a place of peace, and was spared the knowledge

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of the suffering of her child. Her father — she could not tolerate the thought of the grief that must be his.

Devereux had probably put her out of his thoughts. Why should it be otherwise? She knew he was generous and full of knightly instincts, but what could chivalry and courage avail? He had loved her while she was beautiful and surrounded by all that was attractive and luxurious in life; and doubtless he was sincere when he told her that his love was equal to any sacrifice. But he had not known what he promised when he engaged himself to follow her to Siberia, and there wrest her from the clutches of an all-powerful and omnipresent government; and perhaps a consultation with those who were familiar with the perils of such an enterprise had convinced him of its impossibility. How many persons had ever effectually escaped from Siberia? The successful and permanent escapes could be counted on the fingers of her right hand; and, so far as she knew, no woman had ever been among those fortunates. Where, as in her case, penal servitude was added to mere banishment, an attempt to get away was folly.

Valérie had begun her life with exalted ideas as to its dignity, cherishing the theory that it was intrusted to her as a sacred lamp, to be

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kept in order and well-trimmed, that the light might burn with a steadfast brightness and beauty. Her soul was to be developed by her until, like a dazzling jewel, it absorbed all the colours of the heavens, and shone with the diamond light of the sun. Her mind was never to be soiled by unworthy thoughts, nor sullied by the temptation to ungentle and selfish actions; and when there dawned upon her a complete realisation of the condition of her own people, her desires flew immediately to the means of improving it. She became interested in politics in a country where politics is such a perilous game. She had none of the masculine qualities of those indomitable French women who gave up their lives for the liberty of France. It was rather the sympathetic side of her nature that was appealed to. She saw that there was much unmerited suffering, that freedom was but an empty name, and that those who were punished deserved often the unfading laurel of the hero. In no country in the world did the people endure such wrongs. She beheld everywhere a thraldom that made thought illegitimate, that placed a tariff on the spontaneous speech of the people, that enslaved body and soul. She took up the work of improvement in much the same spirit as the women of London have shown in their efforts to house the poor and to amend the

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cheerless life of the little waifs in the streets ; or as the women of America in their warfare against the saloons. A noble cause invited her ; and the luxury of her surroundings did not prevent her responding to it. She was at that youthful, enthusiastic age when the reformation of humanity seems an easy task. She had taken but small account of the stony wickedness in the world. How indeed could she have known that evil had built its bastions in the heart of the great cities ; that it had thrown up its fortifications in the sparsely settled plains ; that it held the high places in the land ; that it was girt about with unwearied power, and panoplied with a splendour filched from heaven ?

She did not know that in joining a liberal movement for the education and improvement of the people she was likely to be of those who are discredited before the world.

That there may be no doubt in the reader's mind, it is proper to present him with the platform of the Nihilists whose principles she had embraced.

In the year 1880 the Nihilists drew up a schedule of their demands, and actually had a copy of it handed to the Czar, a brave woman acting as the messenger. What did this schedule contain ? Simply a demand for the following concessions :—

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1. Permanent popular representation with full power over all questions of state.
2. Extensive local self-government, with officials elected by the people.
3. Complete liberty of conscience, of speech, of the press, of association, of electoral agitation.
4. Universal suffrage.
5. Replacement of the standing army by a territorial army.

The people who demand these not very dangerous rights are all traitors under the Russian statutes, by reason of their demand; and, if detected in propagating their opinions, are liable to death or banishment. They are therefore denied the right of maintaining them openly. Secrecy becomes a necessity. The taking of human life becomes even a necessity at times; and whenever the appeal to death has been taken, it has been for the purpose of drawing attention to unbearable wrongs, which could be made apparent to the people in no other way.

It was for maintaining views which every American and every Englishman considers indispensable to the higher welfare of man, that Valérie Melnikoff now found herself torn from her luxurious home and sent in degradation to Siberia. No wonder that she should begin to doubt not only such a fragile thing as love,

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but the value of patriotism and the justice of God.

At Tomsk she began the long overland journey to the mines of Kara, with no tender or hopeful feelings in her heart. She had heard of the death of her father, but she had shed no tears. Only a deeper numbness took possession of her. It did not seem to concern her. She did not grasp the fact in its full significance. For several weeks she had been familiar with death. She had seen little children die in the unclean holes of the convict barge. She had seen them killed on the long journey by the refusal of brutal soldiers to allow them to ride in the telegas. She had seen a number of the exiles shot down for trying to escape from the convoy. She had seen some of her companions die on the road for want of any place to rest, or of any physician to attend them. And death had seemed to her such a blessed peace compared with the weary life toiling onward, bleak and unlovely, to the terrible goal thousands of miles ahead. Anything that ended the fitful fever ; that soothed the weary, aching limbs ; that wiped away forever the always burning, racking, torturing power of thought, would have been a felicitous relief.

The route of the exiles now lay across the burn-

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ing steppe. The road was in a wretched condition, and it was a torture to ride over it in a springless telega. The plain had a grey, parched appearance ; and sometimes they could look over its fenceless surface for miles and not see a human being or a habitation for man. At wide intervals they passed the wretched Siberian villages, consisting of two rows of low frame buildings separated by an avenue of mud. Sometimes the village priest in full regalia came out to meet them and hold an impromptu service with them, but he was often treated with contempt. The Russian will make all sorts of prostrations and genuflexions in passing shrines, and he has the most superstitious reverence for images ; but he holds the white priests in disdain, and frequently greets them with chaff and ribaldry. The utter emptiness of the Russian religion is everywhere discernible ; and if the Nihilists do not believe in the degrading and immoral superstition that passes for religion in that country, who shall say that it is not a credit to their intelligence ?

After several days of travel, the journey of the footsore exiles was often diversified by sudden rain-storms of icy coldness. As no provision had been made for this, they were drenched to the skin, and their emaciated bodies were almost frozen. Thus they passed many days,

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alternating between the ordeals of heat and cold, and at night seeking a dismal rest in the *etapes*.

Provisions were almost twice as expensive now; and many of the exiles, who were allowed only a certain amount a day, were reduced almost to starvation. As they came to the villages they invariably chanted the Beggars' Song, which seldom failed to soften the hearts of the people and bring a liberal contribution of food.

At Irkoutsk, Madame Paraveloff's sufferings came to an end. She died without any medical attention, except such imperfect service as her husband could give her. She should have been placed in a hospital long before; but the Czar makes no provision for this sort of sentimental luxury, and she had been compelled to travel hundreds of miles, gasping, coughing, fainting, often saturated with rain, in a jolting telega. She died about sunset, just as the spires and domes of Irkoutsk came into sight; and saddest sight of all it was to see that the convoy party was hardly moved by her passing away, and regarded it as a natural incident of the journey.

“Oh, the pain, the pain of it!” were her last words.

And the telega did not even stop to ease her pain.

If anything could have added to the gloom of our little band of political exiles, it would have

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been this ; but even the cup of bitterness will hold only so much, and all of them were now convinced that there was no peace save in death. The Countess and Valérie envied her, and looked with perhaps a deeper horror to the continuance of the journey without her. The Doctor's heart had been broken long before ; and he took a dismal joy in the thought that she had at last eluded her hardened taskmasters, and cheated the living death at the mines. But throughout the remainder of the journey he was as grim as a fate.

Adam Bogdanovitch had lost his reason almost entirely, and his mania had taken a peculiar form. To everybody he met he explained that he was a commissioner of the Czar, who had sent him to Siberia to make a report on the condition of the prisons and suggest reforms.

“The Czar will make it all right,” he would assure any one who listened to him. “The Czar loves his people, and he has authorized me to see that they are well provided for ?”

At last the exiles came to the mountainous district, and the winter had already set in. The tortures of extreme cold succeeded those of blistering heat, and the way lay over rough mountain-roads covered with snow and ice. Part of the journey was made on sleds drawn

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over the ice-covered Shilka, which runs near the mines of Kara.

It was a cold day in November when the exile party reached the valley in which is the penal colony. The thermometer was several degrees below zero. Though they had suffered almost every variety of emotion to which human beings are liable, all felt a thrill of horror as their eyes fell upon the convict town.

In the bottom of the valley was the dreary settlement. And all about it was snow — snow on the roofs of the dirty little buildings ; snow on the ground ; snow on the face of the river ; snow on the mountains that encircled the valley. And above and back of it all, a thick, dark, gloomy sky — a sort of pale reflection of night — hanging like a pall. Nowhere the sign of a green thing. Nowhere any patch of colour. Everywhere that dismal Arctic expanse, with the eternal frown of the heavens bending over it, while an intense, bitter, and relentless cold pervaded the valley.

No wonder the hearts of the exiles were sick at sight of that dreary place, forgotten of God, which they had travelled five thousand miles, or a fifth of the circumference of the globe, to reach !

It was toward night when they entered the settlement and were turned over to the gover-

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nour of the place and assigned their prison quarters.

And not one word had Valérie received from Devereux. Why had he not come? she asked herself as she lay half frozen in her cell that night. If he did not intend to come, why had he promised her that he would, and thus filled her head with illusory hopes?

CHAPTER XI.

THE HUNGER STRIKE AT THE MINES.

THERE were several prisons at Kara, and Valérie and the Countess were confined in the lower one, toward the mouth of the valley, with a number of female political prisoners; while Speranski, Paraveloff, and Bogdanovitch were placed in the political prison farther up in the middle Kara settlement, where the governor of the place, Colonel Batiüskoff, resided with the officers and soldiers under him.

The women's political prison was an old log house, surrounded by a high stockade. Entering this place, the prisoner found herself in a long, dark corridor, the floor of which was covered with partly frozen filth. The half-dozen *kameras* opened on this passage-way. The *kamera* in which Valérie and the Countess were incarcerated was a fair-sized room, containing about fifty women. The floor was rotten in places. A single large window, barred and im-

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movable, furnished light for the room, and effectually prevented escape and ventilation. The only fresh air that ever made its way to the apartment passed through the dark, ill-smelling corridor. There were two long benches with backs, on which the prisoners sat, and two broad benches on which they slept. The walls of the rooms were built of boards, which, having become warped by the action of the weather, made chinks through which the snow often sifted. The room was heated by an oven, which was fed through a door opening on the corridor. The usual insufferable odour permeated the place.

There were, as already said, about fifty women in this apartment when Valérie and the Countess entered it. They were mostly women of refinement. Their faces were all marked by the same dead, despairing look. A few of them were insane, and these kept up a pitiful moaning, or went into a series of paroxysms. The others for the most part lay upon the large benches, silent, listless, and without a hope. Their faces told only too plainly that they had only one thing to look forward to, and that was death. No more pleasures lay strewn along the pathway of the future for them ; no more sweet domestic joys could they promise themselves ; no more dreams of home filled with the noisy delights of children were possible to them ; no

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more entrancing visions of ambition gratified, of heroic deeds done, of liberty won, ever beckoned them away from their foul resting-place, and placed in their hearts the voice of a reborn hope. There were possible Charlotte Cordays among them, condemned, however, to expiate the sin of liberty not in the sunlight before the populace, but under every circumstance of bodily and mental degradation. And so their one thought was of the Spectral Bridegroom who would free them from their troubles and pains forever.

Desolate and unwholesome as the place was, the two women who had just finished the long journey from St. Petersburg felt at last a sense of rest in reaching it and throwing themselves upon the hard benches. The prison was an improvement on the terrible *étapes*, and the physical rest was in the nature of a positive boon to them. But the monotony of their life was soon impressed upon them with soul-harrowing heaviness. The prison-yard was covered with snow, and there was little consolation to be derived from walking up and down the beaten tracks in the snowy area, with the thermometer far below zero; while the view about held nothing in it but depression for them. A sea of snow reached up the sides of the mountains, and stretched away to the dull rim of the

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horizon. It was a very dream of loneliness, a soundless, soulless, godless desolation.

The new-comers were soon made aware of the fact that a more than ordinarily bitter condition of affairs existed at the settlement. Formerly the political prisoners had been allowed to read, and, under the supervision of the superintendent of the settlement, they had written and received letters from their families; but from some unexpected whim of the Czar's ministers, the slight privileges formerly extended to the politicals had been withdrawn, and they were left with virtually no occupation to their hands, and with no means of communication with their relatives and friends. Such remittances of money as were sent them were also appropriated by the prison authorities.

In the men's political prison matters were much worse than in that of the women. Some who were personally displeasing to the warden had been chained to wheelbarrows, and were compelled to drag their heavy impediments with them wherever they went; and at night they had to sleep on the floor with the barrows still attached to them. Others had been put to work in the gold-washings, notwithstanding the fact that this work was usually abandoned in winter. And these convicts were compelled to dig with picks in the frozen earth for ten hours

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a day, although their labour was absolutely futile, it being impossible to get out any ore in such a condition of affairs. Sometimes, when the weather relented for a few days, and the trenches were filled with icy water, the workers stood for hours therein, returning to the prison at night wet to the knees, or even to the waist, yet compelled to sleep in the garments in which they had worked throughout the day. At night the maniacs in the cells kept up their weird songs or unearthly screams, and the effect on the nerves of the prisoners, most of whom were men of refined sensibilities, can be readily imagined. It is not to be wondered at that there should have been murmurs of insubordination and discontent over this condition of affairs.

Then a new governor came to the penal colony "to restore order," to reduce the recalcitrant prisoners and "the terrible Nihilists" to obedience. This new governor was a man who had earned the fullest confidence of the Czar, and who could be relied upon to discharge his duty with faithfulness, and without any whimsical pangs of sentimentality. It was no less a person than Major Madorog, the efficient and trusted servant of the Emperor, who had made such a shining success of the administration of the Tiumen forwarding prison. With his customary vigour this one-eyed *vigilante*

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proceeded at once to restore discipline. He had a number of the prisoners lashed with the terrible *plète*; and he stripped others of their garments, and put them, naked, in a dark *kamera*. He also kept the politicals locked up in their *kameras* all the time, except when it was absolutely necessary to allow them to go out. The women were exposed to unheard-of indignities, and on the most trivial pretexts were often compelled to submit to being searched.

The result of Madorog's admirable discipline was the record of two more cases of insanity, two deaths from the *plète*, the death of three children, and the removal of three or four women to a separate *kamera* in a dying condition.

A week after the arrival of Madorog a terrible edict went forth from the politicals, an edict which, strange as it may seem, struck terror to the heart of the Czar's faithful and unsentimental servant. The politicals had suffered every indignity and punishment that it was possible to mete out to them. They were without the means of armed resistance, and unable to effect their escape. There remained but one thing to do, and they no longer hesitated.

They ordered a hunger strike.

No matter how efficient a prison officer may be ; no matter how vigilant a governor may be ;

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no matter how resolute the Czar and his ministers may be, they are all afraid of a movement which gives promise of ending in the death of several prisoners, and of thus attracting the attention of the world. Let it go out that a dozen or two of men died on a hunger strike at the mines of Kara, and the world is apt to say at once that a prisoner must have been treated with inconceivable atrocity to have courted a slow and lingering death like that of starvation. As long as men died at the mines, and, dying, told no tales, the conscience of the supreme power of the land was untroubled. Such things were happening every day. The world heard nothing of them ; and the "good Czar," the benevolent Father of Holy Russia, gave himself no concern. But a hunger strike not only exercised the ingenuity of the superintendent of the prisons, it waked up the governor of the province ; it stirred the equanimity of the ministry ; it smote the befuddled conscience of the Holy Father himself.

When the hunger strike was announced Madorog was furious. His huge, pallid face writhed with passion ; his evil eye danced with demoniac anger, and he hurried about like one of Satan's pet devils. He sought the cells of the politicals, and swore at them as he would have sworn at pack-mules. He ordered their food to be brought in and placed before them.

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“Now eat!” he commanded, standing by with loaded revolvers and backed by a company of Cossacks with their Berdan rifles.

The politicals laughed at him ; and Speranski, who had been selected as their spokesman, stepped forward and said, “You cannot frighten us with your guns. We invite you, beg you to use them. There is not a man in this ragged regiment who does not long for death. We would rather have it at the muzzle of your guns than by the long and weary method we have chosen. You cannot frighten us, Governor. We beseech you to do us the favour to shoot.”

“So you are the leader of this rebellion, are you?” said Madorog. “I thought I should force you to the front.”

“We have no leaders,” said Speranski. “I am merely the mouthpiece ; but if you wish to consider me the leader I can offer no objection. I very cheerfully assume any responsibility attached to this movement.”

“You have gotten this thing up to ruin me,” said Madorog, “and I shall fight back. I shall have you flogged well, sir.”

“You are mistaken. You will not,” said Speranski cheerfully. “The first man that places his hands on me I will fight. I will beat him over the head, kick him, trample upon him, and compel him in self-defence to kill me. And if you

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crook your finger at any of your soldiers I will assault you, if I can get at so valiant a hero."

It would be impossible to describe the various evil expressions that flitted like black birds of prey over the face of Madorog while Speranski was speaking. He could not keep still. He danced up and down. He actually shed tears of rage; for he felt that this was a conspiracy against him personally, and it seemed to him that these men were taking a cruel and cowardly advantage of a poor old man who was merely discharging his duty according to his conscience. He would have given much to have shot Speranski on the spot; but even he had discretion enough to see that such a course would not avail in the present emergency. So he ordered the soldiers to retire, while he went to his house to meditate over the affair, and regain his reason, which had gone far afield during the foregoing few hours.

Food was set before the politicals at supper-time, but it was left untouched. At the women's political prison it was the same. Madorog had gone there and stormed at them, but those resolute women met all his violence calmly, and their food was left untouched. They even smiled at his rage and rejoiced at his discomfiture.

The next day it was the same story. The silence of starvation and death reigned in the political prisons. Madorog's face grew as white

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as those of his prisoners when he saw the resolution of despair depicted in the set lips, the cold, ashen eyes, and the sublime consecration of that handful of exiles. In a tempest of wrath he bolted from the prison and sought the telegraph station. At once the wires flashed the news to the Governor-General of the province, whose headquarters were at Chita. The Governor-General half an hour later sent back word for full particulars, and suggested that the leaders in the strike be made examples of. Accordingly Speranski, Paraveloff, and a young novelist by the name of Chekoffski, were seized unexpectedly and isolated from their comrades. All were subjected to torture by electricity, in order to elicit from them the promise that they would give up the strike, and would also induce their comrades to join them in declaring the strike off.

The violence was absolutely vain. When the torture had gone as far as Madorog dared to let it go, Paraveloff said with contempt, " Bah ! Madorog, you are a clumsy fool ! This torture, bad as it is, is no worse than that we counted on suffering after a few days should pass ; and if you would only be kind enough to increase the amount of electricity you might do us the favour of killing us."

Madorog no longer smoked his pipe calmly and enjoyed the sight of his fellows in torture

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with complacency. He was rather like a drunken man. He moaned to himself. He swore. He cried. "What have I done to them?" he repeated, wringing his hands.

"What have you done to us?" said the novelist with cool sarcasm. "Why, you inhuman libel on manhood, you have done to us everything mean and cruel that your utterly depraved and malignant soul could conceive! Some men study to be proficient in science or art, or to do good to their fellow-men. But your whole life is an evil dream. You study to pain, to degrade, to curse, and to blight. If you had one noble instinct in you, you would be so ashamed of it that you would commit suicide in a fit of remorse. And you, foul cur that you are, have the assurance to ask what you have ever done to us!"

Madorog for once did not reply. The words of the young patriot scorched him. He gave orders at once to the soldiers to place the three men in one of the black holes; and again he rushed to the telegraph station, and sent his despair over the wires to the Governor-General. The latter telegraphed it to the Minister of the Interior at St. Petersburg, who, in turn, laid the matter before the Czar.

Three days passed, and one hundred and fifty men and women maintained the strike for death.

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Madorog now pleaded with them. If they would only eat, he would use his influence with the Governor-General to have the regulations softened. He promised that he would do everything in his power to make things easier for them. They, however, would accept none of his promises. Then the Minister of the Interior asked the Governor-General just what concessions they demanded ; and the Governor-General replied that the strikers demanded the abolition of corporal punishment, the restoration of the right to send and receive letters and papers, the privilege of reading books, the abolition of all such punishments as chaining to barrows and confinement in the black holes. They also asked for better clothing and bed-coverings, and for twice the amount of food they had been receiving ; the fact being that Madorog had kept back food and clothing really due them, and had pocketed the difference between what they should have received and what they got. The Minister of the Interior telegraphed that all these demands were preposterous ; that the government was not maintaining a club for decayed ladies and gentlemen, and wound up by suggesting that the Governor-General go to Kara himself and ascertain the lowest number of concessions with which the prisoners would be satisfied.

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In a few days the Governor-General arrived from Chita. He found the political prisoners almost skeletons. They were scarcely able to walk. They lay upon their hard benches silent and patient, though the prey of the keenest tortures to which human endurance can be submitted. For ten days they had not tasted food. The Governor-General looked at those ghastly faces for the least show of irresolution. There was none. They cast no appealing glances at him. They had no requests to make, no complaints to offer. They manifested only the most casual interest in his coming, and he could not perceive that it even inspired them with a hope. They had nerv'd themselves up to the point of enduring a great agony, and they cared nothing for his power or his pity.

The Governor-General looked at the women in the political prison. On their faces he saw a smile of triumph. Some of them had passed the boundary line of pain, and their minds were filled with beautiful visions. They were looking beyond their present life into a land that was fairer than the dreams of the poets. Many of them were utterly unconscious of his presence; and when he spoke to them they looked at him with a vacant pain in their eyes, as if he had rudely broken in upon some celestial vision.

When the Governor-General sought to reason

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with the men and tell them that they should be satisfied with fewer demands. Speranski referred him indifferently to their schedule, and said it was idle to talk of less. The Governor-General then flew into a passion. The politicians received it with indifference and silence. They only looked tired and annoyed.

The Governor-General was now as much alarmed as Madorog, and he retired to consult with that whining servant of the Czar.

"My God! man," said the Governor-General, "there's no use trying to argue with any of those people. They would sooner die than not."

"I never saw such beasts," said Madorog complainingly.

"Something must be done," continued the Governor-General, "or the whole one hundred and fifty will die. It will go everywhere. There will be a terrible scandal. I'm afraid you have been too hard on these people, Madorog."

"Oh, no, Excellency! I merely carried out orders. The discipline had gotten low, and you sent me here to reduce things to military order."

"Well, there's nothing to be done but to give in, and to do it quickly."

The Governor-General and Madorog jumped into the latter's sleigh and hurried once more to

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the telegraph station. There the former sent this telegram: —

“ Unless every concession demanded is granted, all the political prisoners here will be dead by to-morrow night. They are in a dying condition now, and some cannot last throughout the day unless they have food. What shall we do ? We wait at the station for immediate answer.”

They did not have long to wait. The answer was as follows: —

“ Grant everything now. We can arrange individual punishments hereafter, or withdraw concessions singly, as emergencies may arise.

TOLSTOÏ, MINISTER OF INTERIOR.”

And so the terrible hunger strike ended. The Czar had been defeated. But the Czar was very much like the Phœnix. He might appear to die, but he was living very vigourously all the same. He might seem to relax, but it was only in order to throw his opponents off their guard. He was merciful only that he might put the screws more artistically and with a greater refinement of torture upon those who did not believe in his theory of government. It is true that his Majesty does not invent all the various plans for “ quieting ” and “ reforming ” his enemies ; but he has always been made aware of the official services performed in his behalf ;

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and, as he has assumed the responsibility for the entire conduct of Russian affairs, there is nothing to do but let the responsibility rest where it belongs, — on the Czar's shoulders.

That evening the Governor-General, who was staying with Madorog, retired to bed early, worn out with the troublesome work of the day. As Madorog sat in his handsomely furnished residence alone, drinking huge drinks of vodka by way of self-congratulation, he heard outside the bells of an approaching sleigh.

He paid no attention to it, however, until the jingling of the bells stopped in front of his house, and thus notified him that he was about to have a visitor. With an exclamation of disgust he hurriedly concealed his bottle of vodka; and, in answer to a rap, he opened the door in person.

By the light of the lamp in the hall he saw standing there a tall stranger bundled up in furs.

“Is Governor Madorog at home?” asked the visitor courteously.

“I am Governor Madorog.”

“I am Dr. Todleben,” said the stranger, “and I have been sent out as surgeon of the Kara settlement. I presume you have been notified of that fact. I have, however, letters

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with me which I shall be pleased to show you."

"Yes, I have been notified of your coming; and you are to be my guest. Let your man bring in your trunk."

The new surgeon proved to be a man of about thirty years of age; tall and straight as an arrow, with a blond beard, a bright, keen blue eye and a pleasant face, a trifle pale perhaps, but full of resolution and manliness. He spoke Russian with a slightly foreign accent, which, Madorog noticing, he explained by saying that his father was of German descent, and he had been educated at a German university, and though born in Russia, and devoted to the Fatherland, he spoke German rather more easily than he did Russian. There was nothing at all unusual in this, for there have been always a great many Germans in Russia who have been prominent in public and official positions and in the learned professions; and these men have thoroughly identified themselves with Russia, and have been welcomed to her boundaries.

CHAPTER XII.

TO THE RESCUE.

A FEW days after the departure of Valérie Melnikoff from St. Petersburg for the mines of Kara, Devereux and Vandorn held a consultation with Todleben and a few other Nihilists. At this meeting the complete details for the rescue of their friends were considered and settled with mathematical precision. A plan was agreed upon which seemed to be without a flaw. It was a project involving international combinations, and it embraced a trip around the world. It was estimated that it would cost a small fortune; but Devereux and Vandorn declared their readiness to meet all the expense entailed by it. That it was a dangerous trip all knew. It would necessitate the violation of the Russian laws, perhaps the taking of human life. The two Americans announced their readiness to encounter any risks, and to ignore the laws of the Czar with a great deal of cheerfulness.

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“It is a sentiment that sends us off on this journey,” said Devereux, “but we shall carry it out in a purely unsentimental manner. If necessary to effect my object, I would not hesitate to take the life of the Czar himself. But we will go about this matter discreetly, and, if possible, we will do no man harm.”

“You reflect our sentiments precisely,” said Todleben, “and you may rely on me to do my part of the work.”

“There is one man whose services I would like to obtain,” said Devereux, “and that is the plucky fellow who climbed the Cathedral spire.”

“You mean Vassily Tadmorski?”

“Yes.”

“I can arrange that. He has the spirit of a Spanish adventurer, and he will jump at the chance.”

“Make an engagement with him, then,” said Devereux. “I will hire him for our service.”

“Leave that entirely to me,” said Todleben.

After the plan for the rescue had been criticised again in detail the consultation broke up.

Shortly after everything had been determined to their satisfaction the two Americans left St. Petersburg for England, where they took a steamer for New York. Arrived in the United States, they spent a few days with friends and relatives, made such monetary arrangements as

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were necessary for the execution of their plans, and then met at Chicago. There they took a Western-bound train, and were soon steaming away over the plains at the rate of forty miles an hour. On the way they paid little attention to the scenery, though it was new to them. They were absorbed in maps and books of travel, sea-charts, and time-tables and railroad schedules. They devoured guide-books, and books on the currency of many nations. They digested Russia socially, religiously, and politically. They read all they could find about Siberia and the prison system. They familiarized themselves with the manners and customs, the superstitions and religions, of the many wild peoples who are incorporated in the Russian empire ; and they did not forget to cram themselves with the criminal statistics of that country. Nothing that bore in the remotest manner upon the design which they had matured was passed by. Thus every moment of their time was occupied on the trip.

When they reached Tacoma they immediately began to lay the foundation of their gigantic programme. Their first move was to get acquainted with a number of sea-faring men. The man they needed was the captain of a trading-vessel, who made trips along the shore of British Columbia and Alaska, and thence

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across to the Russian Settlements, on the coast of Eastern Siberia.

It was some time before they found him ; but at last they ran across Captain Joel Quincy, a shrewd old skipper, who hailed originally from New England, and who had changed heart and abandoned the stormy Atlantic for the more tranquil Pacific. Vandorn explained to him that they were in for a bit of adventure ; that they expected to make their way through a part of the Russian empire where strangers were not received with any marked cordiality. It was their intention to hunt, fish, and camp-out along the valley of the Amur. They had tried shooting grizzlies in the Rockies ; they had hunted elephants, so Vandorn declared in his picturously inaccurate way, in the wilds of Africa ; and they would never rest content until they had killed a tiger or two in the Amur region.

“ Well, boys, to come to the p’nt,” said Captain Joel, “ what do you want me to do ? ”

“ We expect to be at the mouth of the Amur River somewhere between the 1st and the 15th of June, and we want you to be on the lookout for us. As I said, Russia is an eccentric kind of a country, and sometimes they don’t care to let people out of it. They let you in for nothing, and then charge you like smoke to get out. Now, when we get ready to leave, we

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expect to leave. It's a heathenish part of the world, and before we go there we want to arrange everything so that we shall get home safely. There may be half a dozen in our party, and we are willing to pay you two hundred dollars each to get us home."

"Well, I guess I'm the man you're looking for," said the captain, "and the Dart is just about the boat that will suit you. She ain't built for passenger traffic, but she's a trim bit of a sailer, and I reckon I can make you comfortable."

"Can you arrange it so as to strike the mouth of the Amur the same time that we do?"

"Sartain sure. I generally hit that part of the country about three or four times a year. Here's my route. I stop at the Tongas Narrows on this side, at Killisnoo where I git herring-oil for dry-goods and knick-knacks, Juneau, where the gold-mines air, and Sitka, where I do a good deal o' trading with the Russians. Then I flirt across the water, and take in a hull lot o' them jaw-breaking Russian towns, and after that I drop down toward Japan and China, and I git tea and other things there, and then I shoot back for home. Them people like to trade and dicker, and as I've got a turn that way myself, why, I try to accommodate 'em."

"Now, Captain," said Vandorn, who had con-

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ducted all the negotiations, "we rely on you to keep this matter an entire secret. Don't let any one know at any time that you are expecting us. Be particularly careful not to mention it to the Russians whom you may meet."

"S'pose you don't git there on time," suggested the captain.

"If we find we can't reach Nikolaievsk by the 15th of June, we will try and send word by telegraph to some one in that place, and get him to deliver the message to you."

"You need not expect us in the day-time," said Devereux.

"No," said Vandorn; "we won't show up until night. Our signal will be, say, a green lantern; and wherever you see one on shore or on the water, wave a red lantern as an answer. If we then wave our light twice in a circle, you will know that we are coming to you in a boat. You will then take us aboard, and ask no questions, but get ready to sail immediately afterward. If, however, we inscribe three circles with the green light, you will send a boat for us at once. I'll put all these things down on paper, so that there won't be any mistake about it."

"All right. I understand the racket. But don't you know I'm a little curious to know what you young birds air up to?"

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“Oh, of course, I’ll admit there’s a bit of romance and that sort of thing in it ; and what we are after is to make sure that we won’t have to hang up in Nikolaievsk until we can send home to be identified and allowed to pass through.”

“Well, boys, if there’s anything I do like to take a hand at it’s an adventure. The war cured me a little, but I hanker after it yet. I know you young devils are up to some mischief, but I’ll see you through, and I won’t give you away.”

The two Americans were well pleased that they had found such a man as Captain Joel; and when all the minutiae of the bargain had been agreed upon, a contract was drawn up by Vandorn, a certain sum of money was paid in cash as a guaranty against any loss of time that might ensue from a failure to connect with the Dart at Nikolaievsk, and one thousand dollars was placed in bank to cover the expenses of the entire party.

That night the two Americans took the Eastern-bound train ; and before the week was out they had reached New York again, purchased tickets on a Cunarder, and were once more crossing the ocean.

No one is permitted to enter Russia without a passport ; and for the carrying out of their

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plan it might be necessary for Devereux and Vandorn to have more than one passport each. These papers could be easily obtained and *vis'd* in London and other large cities, without the necessity of a personal application. They contained merely the name, without any personal description of the traveller; and so when the two Americans re-entered Russia they were armed with two passports each. A few hours after their arrival in St. Petersburg they were closeted with Dr. Todleben and Vassily Tadmorski. The latter proved to be a middle-aged man, with a stout, wiry frame and a homely face. His skin was tanned and hard, and lined with wrinkles, which made all sorts of funny combinations when he laughed. He had a low forehead, from which his hair stood up straight and bristling; his eyes were bright and dancing; a grizzly moustache covered his mouth. He created on Devereux and Vandorn the impression of a good-humoured, ready-witted fellow, who had a soul for adventure. They were delighted with the man.

They remained in St. Petersburg about ten days, preparing quietly for their journey. They renewed their acquaintance with some of their Russian friends, and gave it out that they were on an expedition around the world. They thought it best to make no secret of their

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revisiting the country. So they spoke freely their trip, — how they had started from Tacoma; had whisked over the plains; crossed the Atlantic, and come to St. Petersburg. From there they were going across Siberia, as far as Maimatchin, where they expected to join a caravan, cross China, visit Japan, and there take a steamer for Tacoma. This would take them around the circle. The projected trip was talked about considerably by their Russian friends, and finally one of the newspapers mentioned it.

“This thing has gone far enough now,” said Devereux. “If we get all the newspapers in the country interested in our trip, there’ll be no such thing as secrecy about our movements.”

“Our time’s up, anyway,” said Vandorn. “We’ll beat a quiet retreat toward Moscow to-night, and stop the chatter.”

That night Devereux, Vandorn, Todleben, and Vassily Tadmorski were on the train to Moscow, the two Americans together, and the two Russians riding in different coaches, and no sign of recognition passing between them. Arrived at Moscow, the same party set out under the same conditions for Ekaterineburg, in the Urals.

Dr. Todleben had, some months previously, been offered the position of surgeon at the

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Kara settlement, the offer having been brought about by veiled Nihilist influence working through channels known only to those indefatigable agitators. Todleben had at first assumed a decided reluctance to accept the offer, and had only done so on condition that he be allowed a considerable time to wind up his affairs in St. Petersburg before he should be required to start for the mines. He had an excellent reputation in his profession ; and this, coupled with strong political influence, induced the authorities to accede to his request for a postponement of the time for commencing his duties.

At Ekaterineburg, Todleben and Vassily took a tarantas between them, and Devereux and Vandorn another, the two parties avoiding each other.

At Tiumen they boarded the same boat, and made the long, tedious journey down the Volga.

At Tomsk they met secretly at a hotel ; and it was here that Devereux and Todleben changed passports and identities. By a slight bleaching process Devereux's brown beard and hair became as blond as the Russian's ; and the use of a dye changed Todleben's whiskers and hair to about the same hue as Devereux's had been. This transformation effected, the doctor was to make his way back to Russia on the

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American's passport, take a lower route than that by way of St. Petersburg, thus avoiding the risk of being recognised as an impostor, reach Odessa, and sail therefrom for Constantinople ; thence he was to make his way to Switzerland, where a great many exiled patriots were living and keeping up an agitation in behalf of Russian liberty.

It is proper to anticipate events here, and say that Dr. Todleben successfully carried out his part of the programme, and eventually reached his destination, where he found that he could do much for the cause in which he had enlisted.

CHAPTER XIII.

ESCAPE FROM THE MINES.

WRAPPED in the warmest of furs, and provided against all the exigencies of the journey, Vandorn, Vassily, and Devereux (now travelling as Dr. Todleben) sped onward towards Chita. They only stopped long enough at the various stations to gulp down cups of hot tea and change horses. Sometimes they travelled all night over the snow-covered roads. Anon they snatched a few hours' uneasy sleep at the over-crowded post-stations ; and it might almost be said that they did not allow the snow to fall beneath their flying feet.

At Chita, the capital of Eastern Siberia, they held their last consultation, and anxiously reviewed all their plans, to make sure that nothing had been forgotten.

And Devereux now began his dangerous and lonely trip to the mines of Kara. He knew no such thing as fatigue. He astonished all the

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drivers by the furious and untiring energy he displayed. Over the mountain ridges, through drifts of snow, and along the face of the frozen streams he took his course. Travelling at night was frequently out of the question, and he often had to sleep at the lonely house of some peasant, on the bank of the river. The villages were few and far between, and they had no provision for the entertainment of guests, as guests were a species of human kind not contemplated in such an out-of-the-way corner of the world. Devereux had to put up with the homeliest kind of food and the most primitive accommodation ; but he did not mind that. His progress was very slow; for he was often caught in blinding snow-storms, which compelled him to seek for shelter until the fury of the feathery stuff had abated. At a village not far from Kara he purchased of a *muzhik* a sleigh and a pair of Tartar horses that took his eye. As acting surgeon of the prisons he had a reasonable excuse for such a possession ; and he knew he would need them. At last, after hardships which need not be dwelt upon here, he arrived at Kara, and was received in the house of Governor Madorog, as already set forth.

As Madorog was a bachelor, and his house was about the only place in the settlement fit to live in, Devereux was duly installed there; and this arrangement suited his plans admirably.

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The next morning after his arrival he made the acquaintance of the Governor-General, a cold, reserved, but very observant man, who appeared to regard him with some doubt. Toward this official Devereux bore himself in a proud and somewhat defiant manner. He had studied carefully the demeanour which he was to assume in his intercourse with Madorog and the military officers at the mines, and had concluded that the cold, bloodless, sceptical man of science was the ideal to aim at. He deceived the Governor-General thoroughly; and that individual set him down as one of those men who take the world as they find it, and who look at all things from a purely material standpoint.

Devereux had drilled himself in medicine, and had received from Todleben the treatment proper to be pursued in all such cases as were likely to arise in the prisons. For a month or more before his arrival there had been no physician at the mines at all, the wardens having acted in that capacity. So when Devereux came he found that there was plenty to do; but as common-sense was the main thing required, he had no especial difficulty in doing the right thing in every case. He was very busy after his arrival for several days, and he succeeded in doing much good among the sick.

How great was the shock he experienced when

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he first beheld Valérie, sickly, haggard, and hopeless, it would be useless to say. The sight of her condition filled him with a grim rage. He longed to wreak his vengeance on those who had brought her to this plight. But he had to still all such feelings in his breast. He could not allow the passion for revenge to master him; for his mission there required coolness and resolution.

It was, however, some comfort to see that after his coming Valérie took heart again. Confidences between them were at first well nigh impossible; but he managed to let her know unmistakably that there was no diminishing of his love. Much as he longed to take her in his arms and comfort the weary soul, he was denied all such displays of tenderness. He could only express by his eyes the concern he felt for her. This was the medicine she needed. Faith came back to her first, then hope, and eventually strength.

Devereux had an apartment in the women's prison fitted up for the treatment of special cases; and here he had the Countess and Valérie and a few others placed, explaining to the warden that they were threatened with consumption, and unless they were moved to a better atmosphere they would die. Devereux then found it possible to confer with some degree of privacy with

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Valérie ; and he managed also to bring her and the Countess something palatable every day in the lining of his great-coat. Under this treatment the two women speedily recovered their health — an indispensable requirement for the success of their undertaking.

One of Devereux's most acute regrets was that he could not aid all the politicals to escape ; for the sufferings which they had undergone with so much heroism appealed strongly to his sympathies ; but he knew that if he undertook too much the very magnitude of his programme would spoil it, and he would effect nothing. He felt obliged, therefore, to confine his enterprise solely to Speranski and Paraveloff among the men, and Valérie and the Countess among the women. Bogdanovitch he was compelled reluctantly to leave out of his calculations on account of his insanity. Indeed, from this source only Devereux's promptness of judgment rescued him once from a possible danger.

When Speranski and Paraveloff first saw Devereux they assumed a blank unacquaintance with him. Not in the slightest manner did they betray the fact that they had ever seen him before. But Bogdanovitch's crazy mind was under no such restraint. It had an interval of lucidity, and he recognized Devereux at once, and called him by his name.

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The American assumed a look of sheer amazement ; and Speranski hastened to make a pointed explanation, for the benefit of the other prisoners, as to the condition of the Professor's mind. And suspicion was thus averted. But after that Devereux avoided Bogdanovitch as much as he could ; and Speranski and Paraveloff contrived to get transferred to another *kamera*, where they might consult with the American unrestrained by the presence of the demented Professor.

The 20th of March had been set for the day of the escape, and Devereux had everything well in hand for his great adventure.

There were about fifteen hundred Cossacks at Kara, the greater part of whom were domiciled in the barracks of the central settlement. This number included all those who did service as sentries, as guards, and as regular soldiers. At the lowest settlement, where the women's prison was, the prison sentries and the guards were all that were considered necessary. Devereux had made the acquaintance personally of every man who was called upon for sentry duty at either of the political prisons, and whenever in his night-rounds he chanced upon any of them, he invariably drew from his pocket a good-sized flask of vodka, and thus made friends of all.

Just outside of the palisades were the sentry-boxes ; and on cold, stormy nights Devereux

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often stopped to chat a moment with the sentry and warm the cockles of his heart with a liberal dram. Another habit assiduously cultivated by him was to visit the wardens at the prisons at night and play cards and drink the Russian brandy. With these people the new surgeon relaxed, and he was consequently very popular. And, besides, he was not regarded with the least suspicion. With Madorog he was invariably dignified and distant.

When the eventful 20th of March came, Devereux felt, as he arose that morning, much the same anxiety as that of a general who expects to wage an important battle during the day. As he looked out of the window at the snowy expanse of the valley, with the grim white mountain-ridges hemming it in, and calculated the chances, he could not help feeling a doubt as to the success of his undertaking. Against him were several hundred vigilant soldiers of the Czar. Against him was the shrewd Madorog, whose suspicions were never quieted, and whose motto in life was seemingly, "Watch and prey." Against him were all the sentinels, the wardens, and the prison-guards. Against him were prison-walls, Berdan rifles, flying horses, the telegraph. Against him were the cold and the snow, the perils of travel, the vast forests, and the treacherous waters of the Amur.

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Well might a doubt assail him ; but he did not allow it to grow.

He ate a hearty breakfast that morning, and chatted unconcernedly with Madorog. Then he got in his sleigh and made his customary visits to the prisons, during which he had his last interviews with his political friends. He spent the afternoon mostly in the inspection of the contents of his medicine-chest.

Supper was served at six o'clock. When it was finished Madorog entered his office, a large elegantly furnished room, and sat down at his desk to look over some correspondence. Devereux entered the room shortly afterward in his dressing-gown, and with a book in his hand. He frequently read in the office at night. Nothing could have been easier than his manner, nothing less suggestive of the intense excitement under which he laboured.

For ten minutes, perhaps, Madorog rustled through his correspondence, and was oblivious of Devereux's presence. Suddenly he wheeled about in his chair, a frown upon his face and a malignant gleam in his one eye, and said, "I see that you have put some of the women politi-
cals in a separate room."

"Yes," said Devereux, laying his book aside ; "they were sick, and without purer air they would soon die."

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“The old air was good enough for them.”

“It would have killed them.”

“That is none of your concern, nor mine.”

“But,” said Devereux, rising and approaching Madorog, as if to reason with him, “it is a concern of mine. If the prisoners are not properly treated, what’s the use of a physician?”

“In my opinion, none,” said Madorog. “If I had the disposal of affairs, I’d let all the rascally traitors rot in their cells. They are beasts! I know them.”

Devereux was now leaning gracefully against Madorog’s desk, and holding in his hands what was apparently a small bottle of cologne, with which he was indifferently toying.

He was about to take the first important step in his programme, and the least slip, the slightest mistake, meant ruin. His nerves did not flutter; nor did his manner betray the excitement which he felt.

The time had come.

Quietly, but with a dexterous swiftness, he placed the bottle under Madorog’s nose, touched a tiny knob with his finger, and sent a delicate, impalpable spray up the nostrils of the prison superintendent. His manner was so undemonstrative, his action so unexpected, that Madorog was insensible from the chloroform before he had the slightest forewarning of danger.

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Devereux's movements changed as quick as thought. He briskly removed Madorog to a lounge near by, and threw him upon it. From the pocket of his dressing-gown he took a delicate hypodermic syringe, and inserted a powerful hypnotic in the neck and arms of the insensible man. Then from the cupboard he took a bottle of vodka and a glass, which he wet with the liquor, and placed them on the floor beside the lounge, leaving them thus to tell their own story. Devereux knew that when Madorog awoke fifteen or twenty hours afterward, he would be satisfied for a time at least with the *prima facie* case of intoxication made out against him.

Entering his room, which was next to the office, Devereux threw off his dressing-coat and prepared for his journey.

At that moment there were four other men in the house, Ivan, the cook, and the three Cossack boys who had charge of the horses, stabled in the rear of Madorog's house. These men were in the kitchen. Necessarily they stood in Devereux's way. He summoned Ivan to his room.

“Are the boys all here?” he asked affably.

“Yes, Doctor, they are all here.”

Ivan's eyes sparkled, for he knew the formula, and the doctor's manner had in it a sly insinua-

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tion, which, translated into the servant's vocabulary, signified "vodka."

"Would the boys like a taste of Vodka, Ivan, to-night?" asked Devereux.

The cook laughed merrily, and replied that there was nothing the boys liked so well as to drink the doctor's health. A big black bottle was accordingly passed over to Ivan, who, with an obsequious grin on his face, retired. No sooner had he gone than Devereux finished packing his long valise, locked his medicine-chest, and put on his great fur coat. When he looked in the kitchen the boys were drowsily hilarious, and he could see the haze of oblivion already in their eyes. He left them where they were, satisfied as to their harmlessness, and set forth for the stable, in which were kept a number of horses belonging to Madorog and the Cossack officers, together with the two splendid Tartars belonging to Devereux himself. The American knew the capabilities of every horse in the stable, and he was fully aware of the fact that there were not more than half a dozen of them that could hold the pace with his own. The rest were altogether nags of no account.

His heart misgave him at what he was about to do, for he had an affection for good horse-flesh; but he could not risk pursuit from those speedy trotters; and outside of the stable he

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knew there were no good ones in the settlement.

There was a great neighing among the horses as he entered in succession the stalls of four of them, and by means of a hypodermic syringe filled their veins with a deadly poison. Two high-stepping black trotters he spared, in order to hitch them to Madorog's sleigh, which he left prepared for Speranski and Paraveloff. His own horses he put in his own sleigh, and drove around to the side of the house.

All was quiet when he re-entered it. The governor lay in a heavy sleep in his office. In the kitchen the four servants were stretched out upon the floor, snoring tranquilly. Vodka and opium had sent them to sleep for at least fifteen hours. Devereux locked the kitchen door, carried out his valise and medicine-chest, and placed them in the back of his sleigh, carefully covering them up. The bed of his sleigh was filled with blankets and furs, which, when folded over a person, might be relied upon to keep the coldest weather at bay. He had also provided himself with several heavy fur garments, which he distributed between the two sleighs. Half a dozen revolvers, a box of cartridges, and a number of odds and ends which might prove of service to him in an emergency, completed his outfit.

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It was seven o'clock when he carefully closed the side door, locked it, and threw the key away in the snow.

At that moment he heard a loud knocking at the main door of the house. He cursed the fates that had sent a visitor at such a time; but he hastened at once to the front, lest the vigorous pounding on the door should recall the drunken servants to a hazy consciousness.

A Cossack soldier stood there. Devereux asked him as coolly as he could, and as brusquely, what he wanted. He replied that he wanted to see Madorog on business of importance.

"He can't see you now," said Devereux; "he is asleep."

"But my business is important enough to wake him up," said the Cossack coolly.

For a moment Devereux was silent. He divined that this business was somehow connected with his own.

"You will have to come back to-morrow," he said peremptorily. "Governor Madorog came home sick, and he has retired. His orders were that he was not to be disturbed under any circumstances."

"If that's the case," said the Cossack with a tone of disgust, "I will return to the quarters."

The soldier reluctantly went away. Devereux was greatly relieved, though rendered anxious

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by the thought that his plan of escape might have been discovered. But he dismissed this idea at last as absurd.

The night was intensely cold, and the sky was filled with black clouds. Noisy winds swept down the valley from the mountain-sides. Most of the settlement had already retired to bed; and in only a few of the houses did the red light of lamps shine out upon the snow. Never had Devereux been so sensitive to surroundings as he was that night. He tried to assure himself that there was no expectancy in the air, but that it was the creation of his own thought. A deep excitement, such as he had never felt before, ran through him. To banish it he gave his Tartars the whip, and glided off toward the men's political prison, throwing his doubts to the icy winds as he went. Ordinary perils he would have encountered without a qualm. This was so far-reaching in its results that he was tortured with profound anxiety. In the midst of his reflections a voice cut the air like a knife:—

“Who comes there?”

It was the sentry calling from his box.

“It is I, the doctor,” said Devereux.

“‘Tis well, Doctor. Ugh! What a cold night, to be sure!” and the sentry stamped his feet in the snow significantly.

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“Perhaps a bit of brandy would take the edge off the night, eh, Vladimir?”

The sentry laughed, and stepped out of his box, while Devereux drew from his overcoat pocket a small flask, and handed it to him.

“Leave some of it for the other boys,” said Devereux.

“There are only two of us on duty to-night,” said Vladimir, taking joyously the draught that was filled with oblivion.

The remainder of the brandy Devereux took to the sentry at the other end of the stockade. Thus were the two dragons disposed of with the drugged liquor.

Hitching his horses outside, he knocked at the gate, and was admitted by a guard. There were eight persons, available for duty, in the prison that night, including two relief sentries, the warden, and the keeper of the gate. Devereux slyly slipped the latter a small flask as he entered, and then made his way to the apartment of the warden. A jovial reception awaited him; and soon afterward, over a game of cards, the warden fell asleep from a spray of chloroform and an injected hypnotic. Then the guards surrendered, one by one, in the same manner; and at eight o’clock Devereux was absolute master of the political prison.

Taking the keys from one of the sleeping

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sentries, he made his way to the *kamera*, where he knew that Speranski and Paraveloff were waiting anxiously for his light signal of two taps on the door. He inserted the key in the lock noiselessly, opened the door, and the two men, with pale faces, and with bated breath, came out into the light of the corridor.

“Has everything gone right?” asked Speranski in a nervous whisper.

“Yes,” replied Devereux. “The prison is in our own hands.”

“All the rest are in a heavy sleep,” said Speranski.

Quietly the door was drawn to, locked, and the keys returned to the person of the sleeping guard; and the three figures passed from the narrow corridor into the warden’s office. Here the two exiles exchanged their prison suits for Cossack uniforms; and not five minutes later Devereux was driving them toward the house of the governor, where they would find Madorog’s sleigh ready for them. He dropped them out within a short distance from the house to shift for themselves, while he put the whip to his horses and sped away toward the political prison of the women.

Here he expected to have an easier task than in the other prison. There were fewer guards required; and at that period of the year

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nobody but a madman would have attempted to escape. He counted on a relaxation of vigilance and discipline. He did not suspect how perilous the game was.

He had little trouble in disposing of the sentry and the gate-keeper. Brandy was the talisman that made his way easy. But when he entered the warden's office he found that official on the point of paying a visit to the warden of the other political prison. The invitation to stop for a drink of brandy was declined. There was something serious in the warden's face. Devereux saw it, and he made up his mind that the warden should not make that trip if he had to throttle him then and there.

“Anything the matter?” he asked carelessly, fingering the chloroform bottle in his overcoat pocket.

“Yes,” said the warden, “there is something going on among the politicals; and I think that the other warden and the governor ought to know it. Here we are well prepared for anything; but of course there's no likelihood that the women will try to do anything.”

“Certainly not,” assented Devereux. “But what's the matter among the men?”

“One of the women here overheard part of a conversation between two of the prisoners this

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afternoon, and brought it to me. For this good behaviour she will of course not be forgotten by the Czar's government."

"But what is the nature of the trouble you anticipate?"

"Devil take me if I can say! She only overheard enough to satisfy her that something is now under way at the other political prison. It may be that they have been trying to run a tunnel under the walls of the prison, and are laying their plans to escape in the spring."

"Then we ought to notify Madorog at once," said Devereux.

"Yes," said the warden, taking down his great-coat.

"Let me help you with your coat," said Devereux. "I will go back with you."

As he aided the warden in putting on his coat he brought his chloroform bottle under the official's nose. Insensibility soon followed, and a hypodermic injection did the rest.

Devereux could not repress an expression of triumph.

"With these two little weapons I have done more than a regiment of Cossacks could!"

There were two *gens d'armes* and a guard in the prison. Devereux found these, and they were not hard to approach with vodka. They were at once supplied with enough of it to pre

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vent them from being troubled with insomnia for at least twelve hours. In ten minutes they were asleep.

Making his way through the unsavoury and dimly lighted corridor, Devereux knocked lightly on the door of the *kamera* in which the Countess and Valérie were shut up. A faint tap in response told him that they were ready. He unlocked the door cautiously, and the two women stepped out into the corridor. Both were in a state of nervous excitement, but Devereux's positive confidence reassured them. From under his coat he took a bundle containing women's dress, and sent them into one of the apartments of the prison to discard the prison uniform and put on the clothing he had brought them.

This was a matter of a few minutes, and they were next provided with long fur-lined cloaks reaching to their feet. Devereux now hurried them out of the prison, and submerged them in a billowy bank of soft furs in the sleigh. Before they started he took the bells off his horses; then, leaping in, he gave his Tartars their freedom, and they made for the ice-bound river.

Never before had they known such a wild delight as now, when they felt that they were free; that they had triumphed over their enemies.

They began the journey with the fixed deter-

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mination never to be taken alive. Both of the women preferred death to the horrible life in the prisons, and Devereux did not propose to flinch before anything.

He knew the terrible difficulties that beset them everywhere. A journey of fifteen thousand miles through one of the wildest and most desolate countries in the world was the measure of their undertaking, and he was well aware that they would be hunted like wild animals from Kara to the Pacific Ocean.

According to his calculations it would be noon before the prison authorities would gain any idea of what had happened, and he hardly expected that any telegram would be sent before that time. He even thought it probable that the authorities would fail to grasp the significance of the situation sufficiently to send an intelligent telegram before night.

But when Madorog did recover his wits the wires would take the news to every station on the Amur where there was a telegraph, and westerly to every post on the Great Siberian Road. Russia and Siberia would ring with the mysterious exploit. The governors and the Governor-Generals would lose their composure. The Ministry would puzzle their brains and offer large rewards, and the Czar would fume in his palace. Every official in Eastern Siberia would

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be furnished with a description of the engaging Dr. Todleben and his blond hair and whiskers, and of the four exiles whom he had carried off from under the nose of Madorog and his fifteen hundred Cossacks. Official activity would fairly hum. Cossack soldiers would be set to scour the country. It behooved our friends accordingly to lose no time.

“You can wrap yourselves up well and take a nap,” said Devereux. “We shall be driving all night.”

“We can’t sleep now,” said Valérie. “What do you think we are made off? I’m so excited that sleep is out of the question.”

A short run brought them to the river. The Tartars were thoroughly at home on the ice, and they made it ring with the music of their clinking heels. From their nostrils trailed the winding smoke, white in the frosty night. Over the river they flew with the speed of the arrow, the cold air of the night evoking the fire from their untamed hearts, until they moved with the peerless speed of the sons of the steppe. No word was spoken by the little party. There was enough for them in the rapid gliding of the sleigh which was taking them every moment farther and farther from the unthinkable horrors of Kara.

An hour passed. No sound broke the silence

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save the clanking rhythm of the horses' hoofs and the runners of the sleigh. They seemed to be alone in an uninhabited waste.

At length there came an end to the absolute silence. Far in the distance Devereux fancied he could hear a faint sound of some kind. Could it be that the authorities were already in pursuit? Had the escape been discovered by some unforeseen accident? Apparently the noise was ahead of them. He listened intently. He was not deceived. He heard the delicate echo or ghost of tinkling bells. Undoubtedly a sleigh was approaching them.

Who could it be?

The noise grew clearer, clearer, clearer. Devereux became a trifle excited; a few minutes passed. They were in great suspense. Then ahead of him he could see the sleigh itself, containing a driver and a solitary passenger, coming on leisurely.

Devereux did not stop to exchange any words with the traveller; but just as the sleighs were passing each other the solitary passenger held a lighted match in his hands and bent his face forward to light his cigarette. The light from the match made a little red halo about his head, and his identity was revealed.

An unmistakable exclamation of horror escaped from Valérie's lips, which caused the trav-

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eller to start suddenly and drop his match. He had evidently not heard the approaching sleigh at all.

But before he could form an opinion regarding that startling exclamation, the Tartars had carried Devereux's sleigh into the darkness of the night.

It was little wonder that Valérie Melnikoff had been struck with horror, for she had seen again the dark, passionate face of the young Hussar, Ivan Valerianoff.

CHAPTER XIV.

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET.

“IVAN VALERIANOFF?” said Devereux, who had not seen the face of the traveller. “It is not possible.”

“But I am positive,” said Valérie. “I know his face too well.”

“It was Ivan,” said the Countess. “I could not be mistaken either.”

“What object can he have in going to Kara?” said Devereux.

“Oh, I am sure it has something to do with us!” said Valérie despairingly. “He has followed us there to enjoy his revenge. He will pursue us to the sea.”

“I cannot think that,” said the Countess. “The man has some other occupation than revenge. It is much more likely that he has been given a command at Kara, and has gone forward to take charge of it.”

“If that is true, he will be sent to hunt for us, and he will make no half-way search.”

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“Don’t let your fears run away with you, Valérie,” said Devereux. “When we gather our forces it will not be an easy thing for the authorities to capture five determined men. So far as Ivan Valerianoff is concerned, I should like a bout with him above all things, and I can promise you that he will not get the better of me.”

But in spite of his confident words he was not a little concerned over the discovery that had been made. It seemed as if everything indicated a relentless pursuit. Valerianoff would reach Kara before midnight, and he would naturally go to the house of the governor. He would pound upon the door, and he would not be able to arouse Madorog or any of his attendants. This peculiar condition of affairs might cause him to investigate and learn that something was wrong. In that event the flight might be discovered, and the telegraph would flash the news everywhere, before the fugitives could reach even their first objective point. On the other hand, Devereux hoped that Valerianoff, finding he could wake no one, would proceed to the soldiers’ barracks, and rest there for the night. If his suspicions were not aroused, and those of the soldiers were not excited by the unusual condition of affairs at Madorog’s house, Ivan would probably retire in a very profane

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humour, and sleep long and soundly after his weary trip. It was just possible, too, that the Cossack soldier whom he had so luckily intercepted at Madorog's house had taken back to the barracks the announcement that the governor was sick and would not be disturbed.

But the matter was entirely in the hands of chance, and the American knew that he was powerless to control the unforeseen. There was but one thing to do, and that was to press onward for the remainder of the night at the best speed of which his horses were capable.

The Kara River is a small stream some fifty miles in length altogether, and running in a south-eastern direction to join the Shilka River. From the point of juncture the Shilka runs north-easterly till it meets the Argun River. The two rivers then become the great Amur, which takes its stormy way onward to the Pacific, making a sweeping bend to the south, however, before it falls into the ocean several miles beyond the town of Nikolaievsk. In the summer there is open navigation from Chita on the Shilka to the Pacific; and in winter travel may be maintained by sledges on the ice; but when the spring begins to break up the ice in the rivers,—which happens toward the end of April,—travel by either of these methods is impossible. A narrow bridle-path over the

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mountains is then the only way of making the journey.

Just a few miles beyond the juncture of the Kara and the Shilka, to the east, is the little village of Gorbitsa, the place of rendezvous agreed upon by the fugitives; and it was Devereux's object to reach it by daylight. Fortunately his Tartars had bottom as well as speed, and they reached the mouth of the Kara before daybreak; and, with a grateful touch of exhilaration he turned them into the broader bosom of the Shilka. After a few hours' run they beheld, just as the first light of day was fluttering in the east, the square black huts of the town.

As they approached it they saw some one running out upon the river to meet them. Devereux slackened the pace of his horses, and put his hand on one of his pistols. He was immediately disarmed by a shout of joy. It was Vassily Tadmorski, and the faithful fellow was simply wild when he found that Devereux had succeeded in his plan and brought with him the Countess and Valérie. Our little party were no less pleased to see him. The first stage of the undertaking had been finished.

“Did Speranski and Paraveloff get here?” was Devereux's first question.

“Yes; I have them now in my *polatkah* up there in the hills. They were tired, and I left

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them sleeping. You were so much behind them, I was afraid that you had been tripped up”

“I met with some delays which I had not counted on. But where are we to put up?”

“I have taken possession of a hunter’s hut up there which I think you will fine comfortable. You see the hunters have built *polatkahs* all through this wilderness for their use in the spring and summer. In the winter-time they always desert these places, and take to the towns, where they can find company and a dram. I’ve been all through the valley as a hunter as far as the lowlands, and I’ve picked out a dozen or more snug hiding-places along the river.”

Vassily pointed out a road, running from the river’s edge along the bank toward the town. They pulled up into this, and then took a branch road which wound around in the hills for about two miles. Finally, in the midst of a crystalline forest, they came upon a tiny hut, from which issued a spiral of smoke. The steaming horses found shelter with those of Speranski and Paraveloff in a shed back of the cabin.

Furs and blankets were taken from the sleigh and thrown on the floor of the cabin for the Countess and Valérie to sleep on. Speranski and Paraveloff were fast asleep in a corner of the building when they arrived. A good wood-

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fire was burning upon a dirt hearth improvised by cutting away a part of the puncheon floor, the smoke making its way out at its own leisure through a hole in the roof. The room was odorous with burning pine; but the exiles had been too accustomed to the prison atmosphere to notice such a trifling inconvenience.

All rested until noon except Vassily, who kept a watch and replenished the fire when it became necessary. He also busied himself, while they were asleep, collecting snow feathers and melting them in a saucepan. Reduced to clear water, and poured upon extract of beef, and heated, the snow became a very fair *consommé*. Vassily had not been an idle sportsman, and he had a liberal supply of game to draw from. He barbecued several hares; and when noon came the party awoke to find a meal ready for them. When they had dispatched it, and given their testimony to Vassily's skill as a cook, they discussed the advisability of an immediate advance.

Vassily advised against this, and his reasoning appeared to be sound. If they resumed their journey on the river they could not hope to pass the town of Gorbitsa without being seen, and this would at once put the authorities on their trail. The river might be picketed with Cossacks on both banks, and they could

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be easily captured or killed from ambush. It was best to leave no trace of their route just as long as they could, and let the authorities guess it; for while there was confusion on the subject a concentrated effort at capture was impossible. For a time they could throw their pursuers off the track by travelling at night.

Not far from the river-bank, near the town of Chasovaya, some seventy-five miles from where they were encamped, Vassily knew of another deserted cabin, which he had made ready for their coming. It was accordingly decided that late in the afternoon Vassily should drive in his own sleigh over to the town, and see if anything had been heard there of the escape of the exiles.

Most of the remaining daylight was spent in resting for the coming journey. The exiles also took advantage of the time to make certain contemplated changes in their appearance. Devereux's medicine-chest contained, besides drugs, a number of dyes and several preparations for bleaching and dyeing the hair. The American shaved his beard off, dyed his hair and eyebrows black, and stained his face into a Tartar-like swarthiness. The Countess and Valérie availed themselves of a blond preparation to lay the ground for a gradual transformation of their personal appearance. The

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Doctor and Speranski shaved off their long beards, and stained their faces delicately, in order to obliterate the pallor left by the removal of their thick beards.

Forged passports had been provided by the Nihilists for the use of the liberated exiles. Devereux, it will be remembered, had two passports; and having no further use for that of Dr. Todleben he destroyed it.

Vassily came back from the village about night-fall, and reported everything quiet there. A supper of rye-bread, pemmican, and tea was hurriedly disposed of; all their belongings were gathered into the sleighs, and the horses were brought out. The day's rest, together with a plentiful supply of fodder, which Vassily had provided for the beasts, made them as fresh as they were at the beginning, while his own tough and wiry Yakut mustangs looked as if they were ready for a trip around the globe. Rifles and shot-guns, which he had been commissioned to secure, were portioned out among the members of the party, and placed in the bottom of the sleighs, where they could be gotten when wanted.

Night had fallen completely on the world when Vassily set forth in advance of his companions for Chasovaya. Five minutes later Devereux and the two ladies departed, and after

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a similar lapse of time Speranski and the Doctor followed.

All was as still as death upon the river while they were slipping past the town. They could see the lights glimmering in the low cabins, but no other proof of life appeared. The *Ispravnik*, of whom every Siberian village enjoys the curse, no matter how small it may be, had evidently no instructions to keep a watch upon the river and stop travellers for their passports. At any rate, nobody appeared to challenge them, and they got by the town without attracting any notice whatever. Then each driver gave the reins to his horses, and they scudded away through the thick night for Chasovaya.

Fortunately for their plans they did not meet any travellers on the river, and by daybreak they had passed the town, lying inky black and still in its lap of snow. A hunter's cabin a few miles in the interior afforded them shelter and rendered them reasonably safe from detection. Here Vassily had made arrangements for them, and they were not long in wrapping themselves in their blankets and dropping asleep beside the fire. In the afternoon their scout drove coolly into the village, and fell to drinking with some of his hunter acquaintances there. He returned to the hut with the announcement that the news had at last gone abroad. There was much

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excitement in the village, and the most exaggerated reports had reached the people. The escape was a profound mystery, and the authorities were of course adding confusion to it, in order to veil their own negligence. There was no doubt on one point,—the fugitives were to be recaptured, no matter what might be the cost. The Trans-baikal was posted from end to end with news of the escape. The Governor-General of Amur, who resided at Kharbarovka, on the Amur River, had been telegraphed to, and instructed to watch for the fugitives at every town along the river in his province. As to the route taken by the fugitives, all was uncertainty. The great majority of those who escaped from Siberia made their way invariably westward. Few ever tried the terrible regions to the east.

But everywhere the officers were told to be vigilant. Pickets had been placed on the bridle-path running through the hills and the town of Chasovaya. Patrols had also been stationed on the river just above the town, with orders to stop every one who came that way, demand his passport, and if there were anything suspicious about him to arrest him. And, furthermore, a detachment of Cossacks was expected from Kara, armed with authority to scour the whole valley of the Amur for the fugitives.

This was very unwelcome news for our little

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party, and they were in a quandary as to their next movements.

“We can take to the river, and follow it until we come to the Amur,” said Speranski; “but no doubt the town there at the juncture of the rivers has a watch out for us. We can’t very well throw aside our sleighs and take to horse-back. The mountain-road will certainly be well watched, and it would be child’s play to catch us there.”

“If we remain here,” said Devereux, “we are no better off; for after a while they will take it into their heads to scour the country around the settlements; and then we should be in for a siege. If we had a safe place of refuge I should favour remaining there until the enthusiasm of the hunt has cooled off and the authorities have relaxed their vigilance. If we could just disappear for a few weeks, leaving no sign, they would get tired of watching for us.”

“I know a place where they could never find us; but the holy saints only know how we can ever get there!” said Vassily.

“Where is it?” asked Devereux.

“It’s on the far side of the Stanovoy Mountains,” was Vassily’s dejected response.

“That’s a frightful distance,” said the American. “Can we reach it by the river?”

“That’s the only way we can reach it. **The** river cuts through the Stanovoys, and on **the**

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other side, hidden in the mountains, is the place I spoke of. It is prepared for the party. I have *cached* a supply of provisions, and laid in a lot of firewood there."

"You are sure it is a safe place, that they can't find us there?"

"It's so safe I hope I may be buried there when I die, for the Devil himself couldn't find me."

"How far are the Stanovoy Mountains from here?" asked Devereux musingly.

"About three hundred miles, and there are four towns along the river between here and there."

Devereux took a map from his pocket, and studied it for a few moments, the rest of the party waiting anxiously for him to break the silence. At length he said, "The next town we pass is Ust Stryelka. I see that it stands at the junction of the Shilka with the Argun. Is there any way by which we could leave the Shilka and cut across the country to the Argun River?"

"Yes," said Vassily; "most of the woods along there have been cleared away for farming. The country is hilly, and covered with snow-drifts, but I am sure we could get across."

"What good will that do us?" said Speranski. "The Argun takes us to the same point as the Shilka, that is the town of Ust Stryelka."

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"It may do us a great deal of good," replied Devereux. "In the first place, it's a not unreasonable inference that the patrol of Cossacks will be stationed a hundred yards or so this side of the town. They will expect us to come along by way of the Shilka, and the chances are that they will not be watching the Argun at all. Now, by hugging close to the right side of the Argun, and with the distance of a double river thus between us and them, we should have a fair chance to slip along quietly without being seen or heard. I don't see why it isn't feasible."

"But we have still to pass Ignashina and Albazin, and another town this side of the Stanovoy Mountains," said Speranski.

"If we could get past Ignashina without exciting suspicion, we might cut it by the next place, and trust to luck to pass the other. From this time on we will have to take chances," said Devereux.

Vassily studied for a moment, and said, "I have a stratagem in my head which might do."

"Let's hear it," said all of them.

Vassily unfolded his plan, which was pronounced deliciously risky, but worth trying. It was voted by all to go on. The two women were, if anything, more eager than the men to move forward. Valérie had a greater terror of pursuit from the mines than of the unknown

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dangers ahead of her; and as long as they were moving away from the scene of her misfortunes she had a sense of security which she did not have while they remained inactive. Between the head of the Amur and the Stanovoy Mountains, Vassily had picked out two cabins where they could rest, providing they passed the towns in safety.

Nearly all the towns along this part of the river had been established by Cossacks, under government supervision, and therefore most of the inhabitants were soldiers, and could be called into service in a hunt like this. The country was practically honey-combed by the minions of the Czar. Only a combination of boldness and strategy could bring them through successfully. All felt now the seriousness of the problem to be solved. It was a case of life or death, and they accepted the grim alternative.

About four o'clock in the afternoon they resumed their journey on the river, Vassily going ahead as a scout. They passed a few sleighs moving in a counter direction, but all put on a bold face, and excited no suspicion. Apparently they had just come from Chasovaya.

They drove forward without adventure until nightfall. They were satisfied then that the next town could not be far away; and in confir-

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mation of their surmise a light was seen some distance down the river.

“I believe they have built bonfires on the river-bank,” said Speranski.

“But you will observe that they are only on one side of the river,” said Devereux, “and our course lies along the other side.”

The horses were stopped, and it was not considered advisable to go any farther along the Shilka. After a rapid consideration of the lay of the land, they drove up the right bank and began the journey across country toward the Argun River. The face of the land was anything but reassuring. Part of the woods had indeed been cleared away, but there was in many places an appalling disarray of dead branches, logs, and heaps of snow. For half an hour or more they plunged into drifts from which they were doubtful of ever extricating themselves. Frequently they were obliged to get out and assist the horses. More than once they found their way blocked by felled trees, and every moment they feared that their vehicles would be crushed to pieces. But they came at last to a hill which had been entirely denuded of forest; and, when they had crossed it, they were relieved to find the Argun River in front of them. A steep and slippery descent led to it, and the way was uncomfortably narrow for their

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vehicles ; but fortune befriended them, and they reached the icy surface of the stream without accident. It was with a feeling of triumph, tempered by a renewed recognition of the long series of perils ahead of them, that they started toward Ust Stryelka with all their nerves steadied and every faculty on the alert to effect a passage under the very noses of the Cossacks.

CHAPTER XV.

IN SIGHT OF THE MOUNTAINS.

THEY had dropped upon the Argun about two miles above its juncture with the Shilka. A part of this distance they traversed rapidly, but the last half-mile the horses were made to walk; and, as none of the sleighs had any tell-tale bells upon them, almost no noise was made by the movement of horse and vehicle. Unless they were seen, or made some unforeseen mistake, they were in a fair way to accomplish what they had set before them to do.

Where the two rivers met and became the Amur, the stream attained a double width. The town stood upon the north bank of the upper river, and it was the purpose of the fugitives to hug the south bank of the lower, the Argun River. If it should turn out that the Cossacks had set their watch entirely upon the Shilka, their chance of success would be more than doubled.

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Silently and with muffled hearts they stole along like shadows. On the black headland between the two rivers to their left they could see the reflection of a light. Far in front of them they perceived the twinkling lights of the town. Every man in the party had his firearms where he could get them at a moment's notice. Devereux, having the two ladies with him, took the lead, as in case of a skirmish it would be the safest place for them. They were told to lie flat in the sleigh, and so protect themselves from any bullets that might be sent after them.

It seemed an hour to them all, those few dragging moments just before they rounded the bank that led them into the Amur. Then they saw that Devereux's surmise had been correct. Above the town on the Shilka the Cossacks had improvised a search-light, which they had pointed across in such a way that any one coming down the Shilka could not avoid being seen at some distance ahead. It was a very clever contrivance, and fitted the theory of the Cossacks admirably; but, fortunately for our fugitives, the radiance from the light did not fall near the mouth of the Argun River, and they turned into the Amur without having been either seen or heard.

They were still walking their horses quietly away from the town, when they were suddenly

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made aware of the sound of sleigh-bells in their rear on the Shilka, followed by a peremptory challenge from the bank, "Who comes there?"

Looking back, they saw in the radiance of the search-light half a dozen sleighs filled with soldiers.

This was danger indeed! Their foes were at their heels. Every one of the fugitives knew that these soldiers had come from the mines, and that they had been deputed to hunt down the runaways.

The soldiers stopped to explain their mission perhaps to the watchful Cossacks. Our friends were in a quandary as to the plans of their pursuers. If the soldiers had been going all day they would in all likelihood remain at Ust Stryelka for supper, possibly rest there for the night. If, on the other hand, they had stopped at Chasovaya for their evening meal, they were probably prepared to spend the night in pursuit on the river.

Whatever the plans of their pursuers might be, the runaways squandered no time in putting their horses into a run.

Once well out of hearing, they flew onward like the dolorous night wind. It was a cold black night flecked with a few cheerless stars; but the pulses of the fugitives were on fire. The horses caught the fierce excitement of their

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drivers. Past the headlands of snow, under the black sky, along the silent frozen river they flashed like shadowy monsters. Many a swift league they left behind their spinning heels. Did the noble beasts know that life was the prize for which they were running? Did they know that they were carrying to safety these weary children of freedom? It would seem so. For they did the work of Titans.

Hour after hour they kept up this matchless speed, with but few intermissions, and toward morning they came to Ignashina. On the left bank of the river they saw a solitary camp-fire, around which were gathered a number of Cossacks. In accordance with the plan suggested by Vassily, Devereux got into the scout's sleigh, while the Countess and Speranski changed places in the other vehicles.

Vassily and the American set forth boldly and openly, making a vast deal of noise, while the other sleighs slipped along the further side of the river.

The watchers on the bank were at once aroused by the noise, and their whole attention was concentrated on Vassily and Devereux, who came unconcernedly toward them.

“Stop there!” cried the sentries.

With a wonderful amount of noise, and a good deal of profanity, Vassily pulled up, and Deve-

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reux expostulated loudly and excitedly in English. They were immediately surrounded by the guards ; and all the while the runaways were gliding noiselessly past on the other side of the river.

“ Why the devil can’t we go on ? ” shrieked Devereux in broken Russian. “ Are we to have a row at every town we come to ? ”

“ We must know who you are. Show your passports ! ” shrieked back the leader of the Cossacks.

“ This is an American traveller who is hurrying forward to join some friends in the Amur province,” explained Vassily.

“ Show your passports ! Your passports ! ”

And so they quarrelled and argued ; and when a decent time had elapsed for their friends to get by they pulled out their passports. These were scanned with painstaking caution by the officer, who also took an inventory of Devereux’s appearance, and compared it with a memorandum he had. He was at last reluctantly satisfied that the swarthy young American could not be any one of the persons whom he had been ordered to keep a watch for. But he put a few questions to Vassily before dismissing them.

“ What are you doing with the American Barin ? ”

“ I am a hunter,” said Vassily.

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“He is a hunter,” said one of the Cossacks ;
“I’ve seen him before in the village.”

“I am taking Barin Devereux down the river
for a big hunt,” said Vassily.

The Cossacks conferred together, and one of them was heard to suggest that Devereux and Vassily be searched. The leader, however, opposed this. He thought they might be going too far, as they had no instructions to this effect. The passports were both properly *viséed*, and neither of the strangers answered in any essential particular to the descriptions of the runaways. After a terrible suspense, which they managed to conceal, Devereux and Vassily were told that they could go.

They got into their sleigh without betraying their exultation, and straightway left the deceived Cossacks to their scanty camp-fire, and joined their companions beyond the town.

“I’d rather run the gauntlet of their rifles than try that again,” said Devereux. “A man is perfectly helpless under such circumstances. We had to keep our guns out of sight, for fear of exciting suspicion, and if those fellows had taken it into their clumsy brains to detain us, we could not have raised a finger against them.”

“Still the scheme worked out as I said it would,” replied Vassily with a cheerful, complacent laugh.

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“A capital scheme, Vassily. There’s no doubt of that ; but I don’t want to put myself in a cage again where I have no chance to fight, even though a fight be the proper thing.”

They pushed on leisurely now, knowing that they were comparatively safe for the time being ; and in the course of a few hours they came to their next halting-place.

The bank of the river before which they stopped was a steep, dangerous-looking series of ledges. It was impossible to find there a roadway wide enough for the passage of the sleighs. So they took the horses up singly, and then by means of a stout rope, which Vassily had provided, they pulled the vehicles sheer up from ledge to ledge, until they reached a little plateau in the hills, at the further end of which a deserted *polatkah* was situated. Here they rested for several hours, each man, however, taking his turn as sentry, and keeping a watch upon the river. As their pursuers did not put in an appearance, they concluded that the night had been spent at Ust Stryelka. At three o’clock in the afternoon they lowered their sleighs and resumed their journey. About nine o’clock that night they came to Albazin. Big bonfires had been lighted, and the river was broadly illumined. To their surprise the Cossacks did not seem to be on the watch. They had thrown down their

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guns, and were dancing about the fires like so many red devils. Some of them held black bottles in their hands. They were holding a drunken orgie.

“What is the cause of all this jollification?” asked Devereux.

“This is one of the Holy Saints’ days,” said Vassily, “and they are celebrating.”

“We will leave them then to their religious meditations, and not stop to show our passports,” said Devereux.

“What a comment on the state religion!” said the Doctor.

“Here we go,” said Vassily, giving his horses the whip.

The fugitives took the opposite side of the river, expecting to escape observation; but they were disappointed. There was a howl of rage from the drunken Cossacks. The little party had been discovered.

The bottles of vodka were tossed into the fire, and the Berdan rifles were picked up. Then rapid shots broke upon the air; but the bullets went singing wide of the mark, and the fugitives were out of harm’s way in a trice.

Between Albazin and the Stanovoy Mountains there was another secluded stopping-place, which Vassily had pre-empted for them. They drew

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near this place about daybreak, and rested there until late in the afternoon.

To the east, in the sunshine, they beheld for the first time the airy blue outlines of the mountains, and they knew that once within their mighty embrace they were safe. Between them and safety, however, they would find a patrol on the river at the base of the mountains, a patrol probably rendered doubly alert by the failures of the pickets at other places. What would they not have given to be on the other side of that blue ridge in the east?

In the meantime they were no little puzzled to know what had become of their pursuers. Had they passed onward, and established themselves at the base of the mountains, to intercept them there? When would they and their foes be brought face to face?

They did not crawl from their hiding-place until it was dark. Their horses had suffered from the tremendous strain put upon them, and a long rest was imperative. The beasts were rubbed most tenderly that day, and provided with a royal banquet of fodder. No precaution or care was omitted to render them fitted for the work of the night.

It was eight o'clock before the start was made. Anxiety pervaded the hearts of all. Once in the mountains, and they were safe; but who,

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could foresee the perils that would beset them on that long, gloomy ride through the grim valley? They were all silent, absorbed in their own thoughts.

During this exciting experience Devereux and Valérie had indulged in none of the tender confidences of lovers. He omitted no effort to procure her comfort, and was ever solicitous about her welfare. His behaviour showed that she was always in his thoughts; but both realized that they were encompassed by too many perils, and a steady vigilance was too imperative to admit the sweet interchanges of love. They were afraid to trust their hope to its wings, lest misfortune come and crush it forever.

It would be impossible to describe accurately Valérie's state of mind during the days which had elapsed since her escape. She was carried away by an excitement which was pleasurable. The presence of Devereux alone prevented her excitement from degenerating into absolute terror. There was something so reassuringly fearless and resolute about him that her reliance upon him never wavered. He was absolutely indifferent to the rigid laws and customs with which the country was incrusted. He bade defiance to them all. The Czar's holy power had no authoritative terrors for him. Valérie could not but deeply admire the American spirit which

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was so free from all trammels save those imposed by liberty, conscience, and truth.

One fear she had, — Ivan Valerianoff.

Not altogether, or chiefly, was this fear for herself. She feared for Devereux. If those two men should ever come together — and a premonition told her that they would some day — she was afraid that the American would be killed by the implacable Russian. That Devereux was not lacking in spirit she knew. He was full of resources : he was a cool hand in the presence of danger, and he seemed to have no fear of death ; but she knew nothing of his skill with the weapons of war, whereas Valerianoff was regarded as the most dangerous adversary in St. Petersburg. As a swordsman he was the model for all the wild young Russians in the army. With the pistol he was an adept. She could not help shuddering at the thought that this man and Devereux would one day confront each other. Her instincts told her that Ivan would be among their pursuers.

And Valérie Melnikoff was right on this point. As soon as the situation had been fully grasped at Kara, the befuddled but furious Madorog was glad enough to dispatch Ivan Valerianoff in pursuit. Ivan had been sent to Kara as military head of the Cossack forces there, reporting to

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Madorog ; and when he had learned that the very party he had betrayed had escaped he was eager to hunt them down. A bitter hatred filled his breast against the woman who had loved an American in preference to him, and he could have stifled her with the same mathematical precision that Othello displayed in putting out the light of Desdemona. How Todleben came to take so much interest in the case he was at a loss to imagine. At first he suspected that the alleged doctor was in love with her. Then the thought of the Nihilists occurred to him and rendered him uncomfortable ; for if they were able to rescue their friends from the mines of Kara, would they not be able to strike their foes at the same place ? Ivan was a fellow of infinite bravery, but he quailed at the thought of the silent, mysterious pursuit which might be instituted against him.

On the river Valerianoff made several insignificant discoveries. The first two or three villages he stopped at he heard nothing of the fugitives. They had, he thought, naturally taken advantage of the first hours of paralysis of the Kara authorities to put as many miles between them and the mines as was possible. But at Ignashina the Cossacks had stopped two suspicious-looking persons, who had, however, shown their passports and gone on.

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“One of them was a young American,” said the Cossack with whom Ivan was talking.

At this Ivan pricked up his ears. He did not like Americans.

“An American?” he said. “What was his appearance?”

The Cossack described him. Ivan’s interest fell; but he idly asked his name. The Cossack could not remember, but he had written it down in a note-book. This he handed to the officer.

“Frank Devereux!” said Valerianoff hoarsely. “Who was with him?”

“A Russian hunter named Vassily Tad-morski.”

Was this indeed Devereux? And, if so, where had he come from? Had he dropped down from the skies? But this man did not answer to the description of Devereux. Still, what could be easier than to change one’s appearance? And if the American had done this he was certainly about some dubious business. He had a hand in the escape. The flinty light of murder came into the eyes of the Russian as he contemplated this possibility. If he could only measure weapons with this American!

At Albazin he learned that the drunken Cossacks had fired on three sleighs on the far

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side of the river, and that the travellers had escaped.

He was thoroughly puzzled.

If these were the fugitives, where had they come from? How had they managed to elude the patrol at Ust Stryelka, and the evidently vigilant guard at Ignashina?

He raged with impatience to push forward and come up with these mysterious travellers. But the horses he had were nags of low degree, and, under his cruel treatment, some of them had broken down completely. He was, therefore, in enforced idleness at Albazin for several hours before he could procure substitutes. Those who had horses there did not want to part with them, and it seemed to him that some demon was multiplying obstacles against him. But at last all the difficulties were vanquished, and with fifteen Cossacks he set out like a fury for the mountains.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE HEART OF THE STANOVOLS.

AT midnight the fugitives from Kara were close upon the base of the Stanovoy Mountains, where an insignificant town had been built.

Big bonfires were burning along the left side of the river in front of the town, betokening the continued activity of the authorities ; and around these fires were huddled the Cossacks, looking like so many gigantic genii in the red light. The glare of the fires lighted up the river from bank to bank, and made it impossible for any vehicle to pass without being seen.

A road ran along the river-bank, disappeared in the hilly ground, went through the middle of the town, and then skirted the river again beyond the town. Whether this road was guarded or not was the important question. If it were not, it would furnish them an easy means of escape.

It was debated whether it would not be safer

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to enter the town boldly, relying on the chance that the watch was posted entirely upon the river. The very difficulty and danger of this route might, after all, be its safety ; and it was not improbable that the Cossacks would assume that none but a fool would attempt such a passage, and, therefore, they might relax their vigilance in that quarter.

“ If we could draw their attention to the river by some clever device,” said Devereux, “ we could get through the town.”

“ I will draw their attention to the river,” said Speranski.

“ How will you do it ? ”

“ I will take Vassily’s sleigh and bolt past them.”

“ They will see you and fire on you,” suggested Devereux.

“ I will keep right on. All the soldiers on duty will run to the river. If there are any guards on the road they will also run down to see what the racket is about. The rest of you can drive through the town.”

“ That’s a dangerous scheme for you,” said Devereux.

“ I think it is my time to take a risk for the party,” said Speranski.

“ But I have a better plan,” said the strategical Vassily, “ and it’s much safer.”

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"I knew something would pop out of that head of yours," said Speranski with a look of comical disgust.

"I can't help it," said Vassily, laughing. "I suppose I was born performing tricks. But really my plan is much better than that of Speranski, and it is a more wholesome one for his skin. It will be necessary, however, to give up one of the sleighs, and the horses with it."

The project was submitted and approved. Vassily straightway set his sleigh in order for the enterprise. All the firearms, and such articles as they wished to keep, were placed in the other sleighs. Two of the blankets were swaddled up, so as to pass for the muffled figures of men. The bottom of the sleigh was dampened with kerosene, and a dozen or more of small cartridges were scattered in it. Gathering some trash in one corner of the vehicle, Vassily then built a small fire; and, when all was ready, he gave the horses a few quick, savage cuts with his whip.

Away they flew down the river, naturally making for the right side of the river, opposite the bonfires of the Cossack encampment.

Vassily then jumped into the sleigh with Speranski and Paraveloff, and the whole party drove straight for the town, along the road beside the river.

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A great noise arose from the bank of the Amur. The fire in the sleigh had touched off some of the cartridges, and the horses were badly frightened. As for the Cossacks, they were astonished at the sight of the burning sleigh and at the noise, apparently of pistol-shots. They ran out upon the river, and sent ball flying after ball at the runaway. The Yakut mustangs swerved further and further toward the right bank, and finally were mired in a heap of snow.

In the meantime Devereux and his friends had lost no time. They had seen half a dozen guards in front of them leave their posts and run, rifle in hand, towards the Amur. They took advantage of the confusion to press forward through the town. In front, and high above them, towered the mountains capped with the diamond points of stars. A few windows were unbarred as they dashed by, but the town, for the most part, was not aroused from its black sleep.

They could not tell what had happened on the river. But every moment was of untold value ; for if the runaway mustangs should turn toward the left bank, where they expected to regain the river, pursuit would inevitably be directed that way, and a collision with the Cossacks would be unavoidable.

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A few startled peasants wondered who they were as they skimmed past the unbarred windows; but before any questions could be asked they were gone.

When they had passed through the town they saw Vassily's sleigh, now a red mass of fire, making for the opposite bank, and the Cossacks, armed with rifles, following the flaming Will-o'-the-wisp.

They glided gently down upon the icy surface of the river, and were once more on the wing.

They were now approaching the valley lying between the mountains. On either side of them vast spurs began to rise higher and higher, until their tops seemed to pierce the deeps of the night. They were environed by the lonely terrors of the mountains. The cold stars looked down upon them in passionless brightness. The fires upon the river-banks behind them dwindled into mere points of light and faded from view. All was silent, vague, and pitiless, but a resistless exultation welled up within them.

For now they felt that they were safe. After a drive of two hours through the sombre valley they came to the foothills on the further side, and there they called a halt. "You can say good-bye to your horses now," said Vassily, "for they can't go where we are going."

It was like parting with old friends. But for

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those hardy beasts they realized that they could never have escaped. They had grown attached to the animals that had served them so well. Devereux would have paid dearly if he could have taken his two tawny Tartars back to America with him. He loved them for their fire and their faithfulness, and it was with a sinking heart that he unhitched them from the sleigh, took all their harness off, and sent the poor creatures away down the river with the stinging cut of unkindness upon their hips. The women pleaded for the beasts, but Vassily answered, "God knows I would like to take them along, but it would be impossible: they would slip over the rocks and be dashed to pieces in the chasms." All stood there silent and depressed until the forms of the horses were swallowed up in the night and the clatter of their hoofs was gradually softened into silence.

But there was work to do and perils to be surmounted, and with a sigh they put sentiment behind them. Vassily thought that the sleighs might, by the aid of ropes, be taken with them, and it was worth while to make the attempt, as they would be useful in a variety of ways. Devereux's big sleigh, for instance, could be transformed into a bed for the women, and a use could also be found for the smaller sleigh of Speranski and Paraveloff. As on a previous

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occasion, the vehicles were dragged up from ledge to ledge, until a level opening in the mountains was reached. The snow here was very deep, but it was hard and compact. The work of pulling the sleighs over its surface was easy, the women taking a hand in it with a hearty good will. By the light of their lanterns they made their way slowly into the heart of the mountains. It was terribly cold and cheerless in that tremendous solitude ; but by working zealously they kept up a glow.

The day was beginning to pale the eastern sky when they drew near a great canyon whose granite walls stretched upward to a height that made one dizzy to contemplate. Wild conceits and stormy monstrosities in stone, partly covered with snow and embossed with ice, lay all around them. They passed the brink of apparently bottomless ravines, and under great threatening masses of stone, that, falling, would have crushed them to atoms. They saw dark, gaping hollows in the rocks, where cascades had been frozen into enormous whorls and stalactites.

A sense of unutterable and majestic awe filled their hearts over the silence, the mystery, and the sublimity with which they were enveloped. Here seemed to be the home of the black vampires which, in popular Russian legend, came forth to people the steppes.

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All the while they were slowly climbing the side of the canyon on a slender ledge that wound its way upward. This ledge was covered with gritty ice, and the least false movement would have precipitated them hundreds of feet below. But their boots were covered with coarse rubber, to prevent them from slipping, and they made fair progress. At times the sleighs hung partly over the ledge, and it was with difficulty that they could be dragged along. Great skill and care were required to prevent them from slipping off at certain points where the path narrowed around a bend in the wall of stone. At these places the women fell on their knees, and crawled around the escarpments. After a terrible journey, during which they were almost reduced to despair before the many dangers of the mountain, they reached at last a tableland.

High above them they could see the sunrise quivering on the snowy mountain tops. All about them were peaks outlined upon a background of higher peaks, multiplying in almost endless succession. Right through the centre of the tableland ran the tremendous rent that formed the canyon. To their amazement they learned from Vassily that his mountain hut was on the other side of the canyon. It made them sick to think of crossing that fearful chasm, suffused with shadowy mists, from whose mys-

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terious depths no living sound proceeded ; but Vassily explained that there was a bridge higher up where the walls of stone drew near each other.

After resting a short time they took up their march, Vassily going before them. They were all ready to drop from pure exhaustion, and they looked forward hungrily to a long rest in the cabin.

While their minds were thus filled with pleasant visions they heard an exclamation of surprise from Vassily. They hastened forward to learn the occasion of it, and, to their dismay, found that the bridge was gone.

For a moment all stood in silence, overwhelmed by the misfortune which confronted them. The bridge had evidently been swept away by a wind-storm in the mountains. Valérie and the Countess sank to the ground in despair ; after the intense strain they had undergone they could not face this new anxiety philosophically. The men looked helplessly into each other's faces.

"There are plenty of trees hereabout," hazarded the Doctor.

"My axe is hidden in the *polatkah*," was Vassily's despairing response.

To remain where they were was to freeze to death. To go back was to be captured. This was the worst dilemma they had yet faced.

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“We must get across,” said Devereux positively. “Perhaps we can find something in our traps with which we can cut down a tree.”

But Vassily was already rummaging among their odds and ends.

“You have fishing-rods here,” he cried shortly, in great excitement, holding them up.

“Of course,” said Devereux. “Do you suppose I’d come to the finest place in the world for salmon without bringing fishing-tackle?”

“But the reels, where are the reels?” said Vassily.

“In my valise. What do you want with them, madman?”

“Give them to me,” said Vassily, “and I’ll show you how quickly I will get across this chasm.”

Devereux took from his valise the reels, and handed them wonderingly to Vassily. The whole party were now interested in his mysterious movements.

The fishing-pole was jointed, and the reel and line fitted to it. Unwinding the silk, Vassily appeared to be making ready to fish in the chasm. But he did not trifle long with their curiosity. With a deft horizontal movement he switched the line around the base of a stout pine-tree on the other side of the chasm, the sinker and hook falling over the edge.

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The feat to be performed was to attach another line to the hook and draw it toward him, thus giving him a running cord around the tree. To accomplish this he took a second pole and line, and began to fish for the hook suspended across the chasm. After several unsuccessful trials he at last entangled the hooks together, and pulled in, until he had a slender line running around the tree, both ends of which were in his hand. It was easy to substitute a stout cord for this line by tying the end of the cord to one end of the line, and drawing it around. This done, a heavy rope was tied to the cord, and in a few minutes the canyon was spanned.

The smaller sleigh was brought to the edge of the precipice, and turned upside down. Vassily then ran the ends of the rope under the runners of the sleigh, and tied them around a tree on the hither side of the abyss. The horses' reins were attached to the sleigh in such a manner that it could be drawn back and forth on the ropes.

Pushing the sleigh out over the edge of the abyss, Vassily lowered himself upon it, and, the ropes inclining slightly toward the other side, he made the sleigh glide slowly across, reached the other edge, and scrambled easily upon the ground.

The sleigh was pulled back by the reins, and

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made ready for a second trip. It was asking much of the women to make that dizzy aerial journey, but they nerved themselves to it. Valérie went first, and was ferried over in safety. This encouraged the Countess, and she too made the trip successfully.

Back and forth went the sleigh, bearing their blankets, furs, rifles, and other possessions, including the larger sleigh. Finally the whole party was over.

Vassily then pulled the rope around until he had worked the knot over to his side, and untied it. Thus he crossed the chasm with his entire party, and did not even lose a part of his rope.

Then a great shout went up amid those awful solitudes — a shout of triumph that flew from peak to peak and awoke the frozen echoes in a hundred glens.

CHAPTER XVII.

FAREWELL TO THE MOUNTAINS.

THE hut which they were to occupy had been built in an angle formed by two spurs of the mountains, and became visible only when one was close upon it. From the other side of the canyon it could not be seen at all, owing to the peculiar configuration of the mountains.

In this secluded place the fugitives found themselves after a half-hour's toilsome journey over the snowy tableland. They threw down their traps with a welcome sense of relief, while Vassily brought out a quantity of wood which he had put aside for their coming. They soon had a good fire. All were too exhausted to look much at their surroundings. Cots were hurriedly improvised on the floor, and the entire party surrendered to immediate sleep. Safely stored away in the mountains, they did not feel the necessity of keeping a watch.

They did not rouse from their slumber, except

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at intervals to replenish the fire, until late in the afternoon.

All of them awoke hungry. There were loud calls for Vassily's services as a cook, and the good-natured fellow promptly bestirred himself to provide a supper. Between the back of the hut and the spur of the mountain he had *cached* such a wilderness of canned goods, dried meats, and condiments as they had never dreamed of. The ladies took charge of the inevitable samovar, while the men, under Vassily's culinary dictatorship, busied themselves over the more substantial details of the repast.

They sat down to their supper at dark. The bright flames from the woodfire lighted up every crevice of the rude interior of the *polatkah*. It contained no windows. A solitary door had to be relied on for exit and entrance; and in the daytime a scanty light filtered through the hole in the roof which served as a chimney. But in spite of the rudeness and discomfort of the place the little party that gathered around the evening meal was almost gay. Valérie and the Countess sat upon an upturned sleigh shorn of its runners. The Doctor sat on a bundle of blankets, and leaned against the wall. Sperranski and Devereux half reclined upon a tumulus of fur coats in front of the fire, while Vassily never rested anywhere for two consecutive min-

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utes. From all faces the sharp lines drawn by an intense mental anxiety had gone, and it was with a keen relish that they availed themselves of this breathing-spell in their flight.

“I think,” said Devereux gaily, “that Vassily owes us an explanation.”

“What is it?” said Vassily, his bronzed face quivering with little fissures.

“How in the name of all the miracles did you ever find this place?”

“That’s what I want to know,” said the Countess, shrugging her shoulders nervously. “How did you come to discover this grim and unrivalled assortment of horrors,—these ledges and chasms and glens? This Walpurgis-night turned into stone and ice?”

Again Vassily smiled, with mollified vanity. For a moment he stood with arms folded. Then he condescended to explain.

“You see I’ve been loafing about here as a hunter. Of course I picked up some friends among those people, especially as I had money and was free with the vodka. You never saw such grateful fellows! I made them drunk. They adored me. Most of them invited me to stop with them after the cuckoo came. Some of them I took at their word, and made them show me where they lived. The old fellow who owns this *polatkah* is a Raskolnik.”.

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"That is what you would call in English a Protestant," said Speranski to Devereux.

"He is one of those Russians who came to Siberia without getting leave. He told me that he and the Czar differed on the subject of religion; though I found that he could get as drunk as Poland, just like a holy Russian. He came to Siberia, thinking the Czar would lose sight of him in such a big country; but the Cossacks have given him plenty of bother. He took to hunting, as being less hampered that way; and he picked out this place in the mountains, because he thought no one could ever catch him here if he wanted to hide, as he often did. He brought me up here once, and offered me the use of the place. He felt toward me as a brother, and that was right, for I kept him in brandy for nearly a month. He had a light bridge across here, which he could pull after him whenever he was threatened with visitors."

"Suppose he should return and find us here, could we rely on him not to go back and tell our enemies?" asked Devereux.

"You needn't expect him until the cuckoo comes," said Vassily.

"If he is a Raskolnik we need not be afraid of his betraying us," said Speranski.

"Why?" asked Devereux.

"They are at odds with the government, like

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ourselves. The Raskolniks are pretty numerous from this place on. Among them we can easily find friends. They are a fine people too; usually honest, truthful, and industrious as bees. They have been the real redeemers of this wilderness of the Amur."

"How long shall we remain here?" asked Valérie.

"Till the middle of April, I should say," replied Devereux.

"We can't go until the ice breaks up in the river," said Vassily. "We have provisions enough to last us I think. If not, there will soon be good hunting."

For several hours they sat about the pleasant fire, and indulged in the luxury of conversation, avoiding as much as possible the horrible experiences which they fain would forget. Far away in that wild glen in the mountains, pursued by savage human beasts, cut off from their fellow-men by the possibility of death or worse, these condemned and "dangerous" criminals did not talk of murder and rapine, but of literature and the arts, the characteristics of nations, and the evolution of constitutional government.

Outside the stars glittered above the fortresses, towers, and spires of snow. That peculiar living silence which haunts the mountains was unbroken by any human voices save their

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own ; but at times they heard far away in some dread ravine the pitiful howl of the wolf, dying, it might be, of hunger amid those frozen fastnesses. Remote they were from the passions and vengeance of their enemies no less than from the love and sympathy of their friends. With the white monotony of the hills about them, and the bleakness of the snow-covered pines, they might well think they were in a place unremembered by God and man.

While they were enjoying their temporary respite from danger, Ivan Valerianoff was not idle. There had never been such a hard nut for the Czar's lieutenants to crack before. About this time, to add to their confusion, word came that Dr. Todleben had reached Switzerland. This report, which was verified, caused some sharp correspondence between the Secretary of the Interior and Madorog. The worthy servitor of the Czar became an object of suspicion. If Todleben left when Madorog said he did, how could he have arrived in Switzerland already? Was not Madorog in the project to escape? Such were the questions asked ; and, grievously unjust as it may seem, that zealous official was recalled to St. Petersburg and thrown into the Petropavlovski Fortress as a friend of the Nihilists ! If he had

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been given time, Madorog could have proven his innocence; but the government was already satisfied of his guilt, or disgusted with his inefficiency, and the hearing of testimony was irksome and unnecessary.

The theory of the government was that Todleben, after furnishing the exiles with the means of escape, had parted with them, and they had taken an easterly direction. Ivan Valerianoff had been commissioned anew to follow out this theory. His energy was wonderful, but so far it had been barren of results. His researches in the mountains only added to his confusion. The burning sleigh, he thought, was a transparent device, which had enabled the fugitives to escape through the village. In pursuance of his suspicions he telegraphed to three or four towns further down the Amur, urging the authorities there to be vigilant on the river and the roads. Replies came that nothing whatever had been seen of the fugitives, but at Kuznetsova four fine horses, nearly starved, had been captured.

Ivan then determined to make a systematic examination of that part of the country. He scoured the river thoroughly to Kuznetsova, but found no traces of the fugitives or their sleighs. Satisfied that they had passed the mountain town, and that they had not passed Kuznetsova,

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he came back with the intention of exploring the mountains.

A light snow had already wiped out any tell-tale traces there might have been of the fugitives ; but he discovered the narrow ledge going up through the canyon, and with half a dozen Cossacks he set out to make the ascent. There could be no doubt that it was a trail of some kind, for he detected here and there evidences that it had been traversed before, but whether by men or beasts he could not say.

The fresh snow, now slightly melted under the warm sun, made the ledge extremely treacherous and uncertain. Two or three times he slipped and came within a hair's breadth of falling over ; but with his usual indomitable fierceness he pushed onward.

The men urged him to abandon the perilous undertaking. No one, they argued, would think of escaping into the mountains along such a pass in winter. But the very danger of it made him think it all the more likely to have been attempted by the fugitives ; and even though he might not be able to get at them, if he could ascertain whether they had gone this way, he could effectually prevent their escape, and could starve them into submission. So he carried his men along in spite of their complaints.

As he approached the tableland, however,

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even he was unnerved, and the blood froze in his veins. A wild shriek of agony rang through the canyon, and looking back he saw the form of one of his men sinking into the black womb of Death beneath his feet. His companions were struck with a panic, and, falling upon their knees, they hugged the frozen ledge like cowering dogs caught in a storm.

“They were right,” said Ivan, “nobody but a fool, or Ivan Valerianoff, would ever have attempted this ascent.”

Slowly and with considerable irritation he retraced his way. The crawling Cossacks in front of him aroused his wrath. “Get up, you curs!” he said, giving the nearest one a kick.

Had he gone twenty feet farther he would have seen Valérie Melnikoff walking meditatively among the pines on the opposite side of the canyon; and had he looked upward he would have seen her horrified face looking over the edge of the chasm, brought thither by that death-cry.

April came around, and a new spirit seemed to brood among the mountains. Something moved among the vast masses of snow. The sleeping world began to dream. The pines themselves were conscious of the change. At times the notes of some bird, rich and clear as

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the gurgling music of a mountain stream, was heard in the dreamy glens.

The awakening of the mountain rills came swiftly after. One morning when our fugitives arose they heard far up amid the crystal spires the rustle of running water. The next day they heard it multiplied from every point of the compass. Frozen cascades broke their glittering cements, and icy torrents swept the wild ravines.

Then a touch of freshened colour, and lichen and moss, and the tender beginnings of flowers, diversified the granite and snow of the mountains.

And at last one beautiful morning in spring, the “plain song” of the cuckoo was heard among the trees, and the party of fugitives knew that the time had come for them to take up their journey again, the cuckoo’s note telling them that the snow had melted from the forests, and that navigation would soon be possible on the river.

For a month they had lived in comparative comfort in the mountains, and in that interval had entirely recovered their strength. There was in the Countess’s manner something of her old-time cheerfulness. Valérie’s cheeks had won back their colour. Her beauty came back with all its wondrous charm.

And it had been a month of marvellous hap-

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piness to Devereux and of chastened joy to Valérie. Never a day passed that they did not stray off together over the snow to be alone, and interchange their thoughts and fancies. His unswerving love had restored her faith in love and her trust in God. And besides the black bitterness of mind over her father's death, there was nothing to disturb her happiness. Devereux employed countless expedients to woo her away from her dark thoughts. It was a pleasure to her to learn all the details of his life, his pursuits when a boy, his term at college, his dreams, his ambitions. She was much taken with his description of his home, which was to be hers.

Sometimes the cold winds whistled down the mountain-sides in a way that would have sent most people in to the comforts of the fire. Sometimes the snow swirled about them with intolerable fierceness, as if it would wrap them in a white shroud, and sweep them into the canyon; but there was that tiny flame in their hearts which sent defiance to the challenges of the Frost King.

It was not without a touch of regret that they realized that they must now bid farewell to the mountains forever, and confront once more the dangers of the steppes and the jungles, as well as the vigilance of the Russian officials.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THROUGH THE TAIGA.

On the morning of the 30th of April, Vassily was busy cutting down pine-trees to make a bridge to span the chasm. The other members of the party were in the meantime gathering up such things as they were most likely to need. A light, easily adjustable tent was among their possessions; and they had found their fire-pot and galvanized iron kettle such a treasure that they decided to take it along. Having within it a copper kettle, with an alcohol lamp beneath, and a stewpan on top, it was equal to a great many culinary emergencies. Their provisions had run low, and there was no trouble in taking with them what remained. Four compact bundles were made up for the men, and all carried an abundance of firearms, so as to be ready for any sort of encounter that might befall them.

After dinner they left the *polatkah* that had

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sheltered them for the month, and began the descent of the ledge.

They were not a little startled when they unexpectedly encountered a wild, grizzly looking man coming up the ledge. But he proved to be the old hunter of whom Vassily had spoken—a wiry old fellow with a bronzed face, small, deep-set eyes, a vagrant beard, and a skin seamed with wrinkles, but withal hearty and honest. Vassily, whose inventive powers were not confined exclusively to wonderful feats, told him that his friends were all Raskolniks, and that they were going farther East through the *taiga*. The hunter was delighted to see them, and he gave Vassily the names of certain friends of his scattered along the valley, even as far as the sea-shore—information which Vassily was much pleased to obtain, though he informed his friend that they would go only a short distance farther. Devereux made the old man a liberal present in money for the use of his *polatkah*, and they resumed their cautious course down the mountain.

Before the sun had set they entered the thick *taiga* stretching from the base of the mountains miles away toward the east.

When the cuckoo's shrill note is heard at the beginning of the Russian spring, thousands of exiles to Siberia are prompted to run away.

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They escape from the gold-washings at Kara, from the silver-mines at Nertchinsk, the salt-works of Usolie, or even the distant coal-mines in the Sakhalin Island in the Pacific Ocean, and make their way over thousands of miles of forest, swamp, mountain, and steppe to the Urals. The authorities accept philosophically the fact that these escapes will take place every spring, and they do not attempt to avert the inevitable. They have two good reasons for this. The twenty thousand *chaldons*, or runaways, are never wiped off the books, and the government allowance of so much per day for each prisoner goes on all the same, and makes its way into the pockets of the prison authorities. In the second place, escape from Siberia is almost impossible to men who have no money, and who have to beg their way from place to place. These wanderers direct their course through the *taiga* by the mosses on the trees, or guided by the North Star. Many of them are familiar with "runaway paths" through the woods, and this knowledge enables them usually to baffle the authorities when, for any reason, an effort is made to capture them. They wander usually during the summer; but when the cold weather sets in they generally surrender themselves, receive the prescribed hundred *plètes*, and next spring try it again. Very few of these

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chaldons ever turn their faces toward the east.

The party of exiles that left the Stanovoy Mountains in their rear, found that spring had come in the fulness and generosity of her powers when they entered the apparently limitless *taiga*. Maples, oaks, ashes, and feathery elms, had put forth their leaves. The wild cherry plum was enveloped in a cloud of bewildering blossoms. The currant, whortleberry, and raspberry bushes, which occupied much of the available space between the trees, were almost in fruit. A thousand subtle and delightful perfumes saluted the senses. Occasional banks of flowers seemed sketched in by nature. The bustling cuckoo, attended by his brace of titlarks, hopped from tree to tree, and trilled his simple serenade to his mate that was to be. Already, too, there was the ceaseless whirring of awakened insect-life in the air, the steadily blowing whisper of millions of rustling wings, the palpable progress from decay into life, the generation of innumerable pests, the crawling of serpentine things amid the damp leaves, the hasty flight of the roebuck through the shadowy aisles of the forest, the scamper of the frightened hare, the sullen retreat of the wolf, and the dangerous proximity of the bear. And thus the *taiga* was expled with beauty and with plague, with odor-

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ous breaths and perfumes, and with deadly terrors, with splotches of sunshine and multitudes of singing birds, as well as haunting shadows and unendurable glooms.

They did not journey far that night, but built their camp-fire early, and erected their tent. A regular patrol was kept up, each man being assigned a watch of two hours.

At the break of day they resumed their march. Their course lay through a succession of wonders that defied the profusion of the tropics. Beneath the shadowy coolness of bended boughs, under the green lace-work of the elms, by the banks of pink primroses, it wound for many a mile. Then there came great fissures in the land, wild tangles of deadwood gathered about the foot of the trees, the angry writhing of uncovered roots — anon an interval of blossoming flowers and ripening fruits and festoons of wild-grape blossoms hanging from the hazel-trees and sweeping the forest with the waving wings of fragrance.

They plunged deeper and deeper into the terrible *taiga*, cleaving awful silences and mephitic solitudes, and traversing dim reaches of veiled desolation and grey expanses, where brooded the very spirit of forgetfulness.

As the day advanced, unnumbered legions of mosquitoes and stinging gnats assailed them,

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and but for the thoughtfulness of Vassily they would have been sorely distressed. Fortunately he had provided himself with a quantity of netting in anticipation of these pests ; and with a piece of this wrapped around their heads, each one of the party was shielded so far as the face was concerned, but gloves had to be brought into requisition to protect their hands. The heat in the forest had grown oppressive, and with their thick fur coats and the baggage they had to carry, their progress was slow, toilsome, and unsatisfactory. The women wanted to throw their fur cloaks away, but they were persuaded to keep them for the 'Icy Saints' days which befell about the middle of May. The men endured their burdens staunchly ; and before the sun had set the party emerged from the *taiga* and came to the open steppe. An inconsiderable distance to the right they caught the gleam of the Amur.

As long as they were in the woods, moving through swarms of mosquitoes, they had no inclination to eat ; but now that they were away from the pest their hunger asserted itself aggressively. They stopped accordingly to make a meal.

In the cool of the evening they crossed the steppe and entered the *taiga* on the other side, wishing to make as much headway as possible.

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For a time this seemed an unfortunate move. The forest was swampy in places, and at times it was almost impenetrable from briars and undergrowth. The farther they penetrated the denser it became; and at last they stopped in the condition of silkworms wound up in their own cocoons.

They were very nearly in despair. It seemed idle to move ahead any farther. It was folly to go back. What were they to do?

While they were restively considering their dilemma, Speranski fancied he saw a diffused light in the woods some distance away. The others confirmed this impression. They were puzzled to decide what course to pursue. They did not propose to retreat; yet if they went forward they might fall in with persons unfriendly to themselves. But the impulse to advance was strong, and they finally resumed their journey, taking the direction of the light.

After beating through the thick underbrush for some time, they came upon a clearer place in the *taiga*, and, still some distance away, they saw the light of a camp-fire.

Was it the camp-fire of friends? Was it a gathering of Cossacks looking for runaways? Was it the bivouac of the wild natives who still clung intermittently to the familiar land before fleeing forever to the deserts or the *tundras*?

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They would have given much to know; but there was no way to find out except by continuing to advance. Even now they were virtually lost in the forest, and, unless they hit upon a trail leading through it, they might wander for days in that spidery web of underbrush.

Speranski volunteered to act as scout, and learn what manner of folk the bivouackers were. The rest acquiesced, and awaited his return. He was not long in coming back to make his report.

"There are seven of them," he said. "One seems to be a hunter. The others are certainly *chaldons*."

"Then we will advance," said Devereux. "We have nothing to fear from them, and they may be of service to us."

The forward march was taken up, and the camp of the *chaldons* was soon reached. They were wild-looking fellows gathered about the bivouac. Their not very prepossessing faces were rendered doubly uninviting by the mosquito bites, which gave them the appearance of swollen raw beef. Most Russians have flat, thick noses, but the noses of these men were monstrous malformations. The red firelight gave them an incisively ghoulish appearance.

The seventh man did not fall in with this general description. He was round and plump,

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and, though his face was much disfigured by the pests, his clothing was entirely reputable.

When Speranski, Devereux, and the others made their appearance before the *chaldons*, the latter rose in wild confusion from the ground, while the seventh man quickly drew two shining revolvers, the only weapons apparently in the crowd.

“Stop!” cried Speranski loudly; “we are friends.”

The little round man with the revolvers did stop. He uttered an exclamation of delight, and began to dance a sort of *khorovod*, which was singularly in keeping with the grotesque surroundings.

“Devereux, old boy, how are you?” he shouted.

Devereux was considerably taken aback, but there was no mistaking the voice, in spite of the villainous-looking little ruffian who owned it.

“Vandorn!” he cried in joyous amazement; “but what a transformation!”

“The Black Crook isn’t a circumstance,” said Van. “I’ve been living on mosquito-bites for two days.”

“How is it that we find you here?” asked Devereux.

“I’ve never had a word from you since you

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left," said Vandorn. "I expected to hear about a month ago. For two weeks I've been at Ansova, expecting to get some trace of you. I knew you had escaped, and I knew they hadn't caught you; but I was afraid you'd been done up somewhere along the route. At last I could stand the suspense no longer, so I set out to find you; and that's the reason I made the acquaintance of these runaway gentlemen. They are from the coal-mines at Sakhalin Island, and are travelling west for their health. Through them I hoped to hear something of you, or run across you; and hang me, if you haven't discovered me!"

It was a joyful reunion. The exiles raised their tent near the fire of the *chaldons*, and then the two friends regaled each other with their adventures. It was midnight before all had retired to rest.

The fire died down. Darkness and silence enveloped them. The weary *chaldons* slept without a dream on the breast of Mother Earth.

Several hours passed. Then there was a commotion in the *taiga*. The sound of human voices awakened every one in the little camp. Waving torches were seen not far away. A panic seized the *chaldons*. The look of hunted beasts came into their eyes.

"The *karyms*! the *karyms*!" they shrieked.

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The words had no particular indication of terror to our friends, but the mournful, despairing tone in the voices of the *chaldons* communicated a subtle horror to Devereux and the rest of his party. What the exceptional danger was they could not divine, but they did not propose to be paralyzed by it. Seizing their rifles and revolvers, they prepared to resist. The women were made as safe as possible in the tent, while the men took their position outside to receive the threatened attack.

They were not kept long in suspense. Two bloodhounds held in leash by two dark, savage-looking fellows made their appearance and filled the forest aisles with their deep ululations. Half a dozen men bearing torches and guns — ruddy goblins born of the night — came shouting as madly as the dogs baying for blood.

The poor *chaldons* fell on the ground and gave themselves up for lost. They moaned and wept and tore their hair. They knew what it all meant. They knew that the relentless *karyms*, or half-breeds, were hunting them down, and that mercy was not to be expected from those implacable hearts. Nothing could exceed the delirious joy of those inhuman hunters when they learned that the *chaldons* were filing through the forest and permission was given by the authorities to pursue them.

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Through the dark avenues of the *taiga*, with torches and bloodhounds, they came panting for the game. They knew not how to spare or to relinquish their pursuit. Nothing could soften their hearts; no pity was ever suffered to stifle the thirst for blood that parched their souls.

They came now with demoniac shouts and wild halloos, not counting on any resistance. They knew the terror they inspired, and they relied on that. They were warned to halt, but they replied with derisive yells and a whistling broadside from their guns. Paraveloff felt a jar and a stinging sensation in his left arm, and knew that he was wounded. One of the *chaldons* was shot in the leg, and a ball cut through Devereux's cap.

Ordinarily the sport would have just begun. The first shot of the *karyms* usually sent the *chaldons* on the run, and sounded the beginning of the inhuman steeple-chase.

"We must make this thing thorough," said Devereux quietly to his men. "Wait till they get close upon us."

Silently they awaited the charge of the *karyms*; and just before the moment of contact, six rifles rang out with the precision of a single shot! Pistols supplemented the work of the rifles. Every tawny *karym* was killed, and

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the bloodhounds were pierced by a dozen bullets.

It was a horrid, bloody sight. There was no more sleep that night. Other bands might be abroad hunting runaways. They watched with ready guns until daylight.

In the morning the *chaldons* changed garments with the dead *karyms*, and possessed themselves of the guns of their unrelenting foes.

The camp was hastily broken up. The sight of the black bloody savages, so justly slain, was nauseating to the women; and all were glad to bid farewell to the *chaldons* and put the scene behind them.

Vandorn's wandering with the runaways now served them well; for he had no trouble in guiding them out of the *taiga* by the path along which he had entered it. They made rapid progress, as the Doctor's wound had yielded readily to treatment and was not severe. And the *karyms* troubled them no more.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE RIVER.

ALL their efforts were now concentrated on the task of reaching the rich plains below Kumara, where the Raskolniks cultivated the land, and where they anticipated finding friends. They travelled largely at night, the moon aiding them in threading the *taiga* safely. They had no occasion to visit the towns on the river-bank, for they experienced little trouble in supplying all their wants on the way. Game was plentiful; berries were to be had; mushrooms grew in profusion in the *taiga*, and the Amur, which was seldom far away, was almost choked with salmon.

A more or less fatiguing journey of three or four days brought them to the agricultural plains. The Raskolnik villages now alternated on the river with the Cossack towns.

The Raskolniks proved to be all that they had expected of them. They were in every way

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superior to the Russian *muzhiks*, who lie and steal and call on their icons to help them in their felonious plans. The word of these sturdy people, who had fled from the religious oppression of their fatherland, could be relied upon. They were as thrifty as bees ; their farms were models of good husbandry ; and there was a brightness, a high, courageous air in their faces, not to be found in the sodden countenances of the easy-going, shiftless, lying Cossacks. Moreover, they did not keep their brains perpetually befuddled with vodka.

Nothing could have been more pleasing than the hearty manner in which these people received the flying politicals, who were taken to their homes and hidden, when it was thought necessary, and supplied with everything they could have desired.

On the 8th of May the fugitives determined to take passage boldly on one of the steamers plying down the Amur to the Pacific. The river was now open, and numerous boats were engaged in traffic.

Our friends found that there was a class of steamers running which stopped at any bend of the river, or, indeed, any point where freight or passengers were to be received. The *Raskolnik* farmer often placed a dozen barrels of potatoes or a hundred sacks of wheat on the

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bank at night, with a lantern over them ; and the next boat that came along would slow up and take them on, carrying them to the place designated in the bill-of-lading which the farmer had left attached to one of the barrels or sacks.

The waving of a lantern on shore at night was all that was required to stop a boat and enable a passenger to get on.

Our friends took advantage of this custom, and, dividing themselves into two parties, sought two prominent bends in the river, and waited for the steamer, which they were told was soon due there.

It came about midnight ; and with quickened pulse they boarded it. They were not a little anxious as to whom they should meet on the boat in the morning. Fortunately there was nothing suspicious in their appearance. They might have been taken for well-to-do Raskolniks ; and as they paid their full fare to Nikolaevsk, they baffled any curiosity that might have been entertained regarding them.

The next morning they found that their fellow-passengers represented many nationalities, and in so cosmopolitan a gathering there was safety for them. Chinese merchants babbled continuously about the trade in stag-horns. Several Dutch traders smoked their long pipes and talked about rum and opium. Tartar huntsmen and

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Raskolnik farmers were there in numbers, and the inevitable Cossack completed the animated scene.

The boat made very poor time, owing to frequent stoppings to take on passengers or freight. The slow progress became very irksome to the fugitives, who were in that impatient state which demands rapid movement and unceasing activity. Moreover, they knew that every time the boat stopped there was a chance that some officer who was on the lookout for them might step aboard. Whenever they came to one of the larger towns they were on pins and needles. It seemed to them that the captain of the boat had absolutely no conception of the value of time. He dawdled away hours at the constant risk that the boat might be boarded at any time by a Cossack *ataman* or the *ispravnik* of a town.

They had two very good reasons for wishing to reach the ocean early in June. The first was that they expected to make connection there with the Dart. If they did not succeed in doing so, they were almost as anxious to avoid the terrible floods that broke the banks of the Amur in July, and spread death and desolation over the lowlands lying between the Bureya Mountains and the coast.

The days seemed to creep by, the very hours to run backward, so slow was the journey to the

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impatient hearts of the fugitives. Devereux chafed under this snail-like advance more than any of them. He complained bitterly to his companions.

“After overcoming everything that has been done to stop us, and outwitting the officials everywhere, it is simply intolerable to think that we are liable to be captured at any time through the sloth and stupidity of the captain. I could throttle him.”

“There doesn’t seem to be any way to help it,” said Vandorn with a sigh. “You ~~might~~ as well try to hurry a hardshell crab as that old cask of vodka.”

“At the rate we are going,” said Devereux, “it will require a special dispensation of Providence to get us to Nikolaievsk in time.”

“Oh, it’s not so bad as that,” replied Van; “we ought to get there easily in two weeks. The river is pretty dangerous lower down, and we can’t travel much at night, owing to the mists; but, making allowance for everything, we will have a week to spare, providing we are not nabbed by the authorities.”

For nearly a week they were in a continual torture. They kept ceaselessly on the watch for their pursuers, yet kept their anxiety hidden by a gay and indifferent demeanour. The nearer they came to safety the more anxious and

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troubled they had become. They had laid all their plans so well, and had made all their calculations so nicely, that as they approached the solution of their difficulties they seemed to be on the verge of a great crisis, and the nervous strain was almost unbearable.

In spite of all their anxiety they finished their first week on the river unmolested. The search for them appeared to have been abandoned. It was possible that the authorities had adopted the conclusion that they had died of cold or starvation in the valley of the Amur, and had given up the pursuit ; but it was just as possible that some trick had been laid for them, and that they would be captured at the very moment when success was in their grasp.

As they approached the jurisdiction of the Governor of Amur they felt the urgency of increasing their vigilance. Doubtless if a watch were kept anywhere it would be along the lower valley, near the outlet through which they expected to escape.

They passed through the Bureya Mountains and entered the depressed lands where the great overflows take place. The Amur was widening all the time now, and they often skirted long islands covered with grass higher than a man's head. Along the banks of the river small dense forests of herbaceous plants, often ten feet high,

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stretched away as far as sight could go, without a tree to be seen. It was mostly abandoned land, for the floods which scoured out the valley every year rendered all agricultural effort vain. The river, transformed into a wrathful, bellowing monster, divided dominion with the wild beasts ; and the land was known as a domain of terrors, which men shunned.

On the 13th of May the boat stopped at the town of Stepanova. It was late in the afternoon, and the captain of the Nicholas was in his chronic state of inertia. Vandorn walked out to observe the town and the people. A short ramble divulged all that it had of interest to show, so he returned and took his stand on the river-bank. Several boats were anchored there, apparently for the night. The smoke was gradually dying down from their stacks, and a feeling of repose seemed to pervade them.

While he was contemplating the scene and hurling a few brisk American maledictions at the slothful Siberyaks, his attention was caught by the approach of a smart, trimly built steamer. It was long and slender, and took the waves like a swan. The name upon it was The Czarina, and a further inscription revealed the fact that it was a government boat. This fact was in itself interesting ; but when Vandorn saw that there were several soldiers walking about

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the deck, his interest became exceedingly active.

The Czarina slipped gracefully into her place at the wharf, and a few minutes afterward two officers sauntered over the gang-plank. They were engaged in earnest conversation, and they did not observe the American as they passed close by him; but he was more interested in them, and managed to overhear this bit of dialogue:—

“It’s absolutely useless.”

“Still I propose to keep it up.”

“They must have been frozen to death. They could not have escaped.”

“You don’t know them. They are sharp enough to outwit the Devil himself. I don’t believe they are dead!”

“Where are they, then?”

“Why, making their way to the Pacific.”

“What! running into the lion’s mouth?”

“No; looking out for a foreign ship.”

“A fine chance they will have of finding it.”

“I tell you you don’t know them. They may be on one of the boats here. After supper I think I will have all of them searched. I’ll get those people if there’s a way on earth to get them.”

The last speaker was a tall, soldierly looking man with a face on which were written the

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records of black thoughts and cruel deeds. Vandorn had a peculiar sensation of dread as he saw the dark, glittering eyes of the man. He knew instinctively to whom the conversation related ; and he lost no time in returning to the boat.

“What sort of looking duck is Ivan Valerianoff, Frank ?” he asked.

Devereux gave him the description.

“Then I have seen him,” said Vandorn.

“Where ?” said Devereux.

Vandorn then laid before him what he had seen and heard. Devereux did not speak for a minute or two. His lips were compressed. His manner was quiet, and there was no trace of nervousness about him ; but Vandorn knew that if Ivan Valerianoff crossed Devereux’s path, there would be a serious account settled between the two men.

“If Valérie were only out of danger,” said Devereux passionately, “so that I might settle with this Russian !”

“Never mind that, my dear fellow,” said Vandorn cheerfully. “You can’t afford to gratify your revenge now. I would like to make an airhole through this artistic scoundrel myself, but I realize that I should be merely indulging in a wanton luxury which might imperil the success of our enter-

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prise. What we must do is to get away from here."

"Well, Van, I'm tired of contriving. It would be a relief to twist somebody's neck."

"Yes, I know. But I'm going to see the captain."

"What good will that do?"

"I'm going to tell him a large, engaging lie, and I then propose to squander some money on him."

Devereux remained absorbed in impatient reflections, while Vandorn retired to the cabin of the captain. That large, somnolent individual was sitting in solitary confinement with a huge mug of kvas. He was a jolly man after a playful, elephantine way, and he was not without his vanity.

Vandorn tickled this quality by praising his boat and his skilful supervision thereof. He even drank some kvas with the captain, and by degrees he worked around to the subject desired in this wise: "I would like to ask you, Captain, how much you expect to make between here and Nikolaievsk by taking on freight and passengers?"

"I could not say. Perhaps as much as one thousand rubles. Why do you ask?"

"I want to strike a trade with you."

"How so?"

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“I’ll explain to you. I made a bet with one of the passengers to-day that we would reach Nikolaievsk in a week. He said that at the rate we were going, and with such a captain, we’d be fortunate if we reached it next year. I may have been a little risky, but I wagered him five thousand against twenty-five hundred rubles that we would get there within a week.”

“You did well,” grunted the captain. “You shall win from the dog.”

“I have a proposition to make to you,” said Vandorn. “I will give you a thousand rubles if you will agree not to wait at the towns for passengers and freight, and if you will stop only where you have to land passengers.”

The captain’s eyes gleamed at the idea of making this sum of money so easily, for he knew very well that if he made five hundred rubles on the trip from Stepanova to the sea he would be doing well. He grunted his satisfaction as Van took out a roll of bills.”

“If you will agree to resume the trip at once I will make it twelve hundred and fifty rubles, or half of what I win,” said Vandorn.”

“You are a good man, and you know a steam-boat captain when you see him.”

“That’s what I told the fellow. Do you agree ?”

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"Ach ! yes. It will not be five minutes before the boat is off."

While Vandorn was counting the money, preparations were made to depart ; and when the five minutes were up the boat was moving away.

The Nicholas had hardly swung well into the current when Ivan Valerianoff reappeared on the wharf with the Ispravnik of the town.

"What boat is that moving off ?" asked Ivan quickly.

"The Nicholas, I think," said the Ispravnik ; "we can find out from some of the river men."

"I wanted to examine all the boats," said Ivan. "I thought they would remain here for the night."

"I should have thought so too. I never knew the Nicholas to stay so short a time here before."

"I think I shall have to overtake that boat," said Ivan musingly.

A few hours later, after all the boats had been thoroughly overhauled, The Czarina weighed anchor and once more moved down the stream.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PURSUIT.

To the surprise of all on board, the Nicholas made no more long stops. Passengers who had to get off were hurriedly dropped ashore, and the boat proceeded at once on its way. Everything was progressing satisfactorily to the fugitives, when, the second day after they had left Stepanova, Vandorn beheld in the distance behind them an approaching steamboat. At that time he held in his hands the captain's field-glass, with which he occasionally swept the country round about. In mere curiosity he directed it toward the steamer, and he was startled to find that it was The Czarina. There was, moreover, an atmosphere of excitement about her. The officers were giving hasty orders. There was running to and fro ; and a little group of soldiers pointed toward the Nicholas and gesticulated. One of them held a pair of glasses in his hand, which he had evidently been using,

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and Vandorn recognized in the tall fellow Ivan Valerianoff, the unresting.

Vandorn could not resist damning Ivan, and wishing that he could fill his body with pellets of lead. But his discovery of Ivan was not the chief danger. Had Ivan discovered them? The Countess, Valérie, and the rest of the party had been promenading the upper deck for an hour, and a good glass would easily reveal them to one who knew them as well as Valerianoff did, in spite of a disguise which might baffle strangers.

Vandorn hastened to his friends, and got them out of sight. Then he took a point of observation from which he could watch without being seen. There could be no doubt that The Czarina was pursuing the Nicholas. Everything indicated that the government boat was crowding on steam. Ivan scanned the Nicholas intermittently with his glasses, and the manner of all on board betokened the excitement of pursuit.

Kharbarovka, the capital of the province of Amur, was some five miles away. It was a place swarming with soldiers. The Nicholas would stop there, and The Czarina could easily overtake them at that place. Escape there would be impossible.

There was nothing to do but leave the boat and take to the jungle, making their way behind the town, and going onward until they could

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catch up with another boat. But the question was how to get off. The women could not swim, and that means was not to be thought of. It would hardly be possible to lay their felonious hands on one of the captain's small boats and make off with it unobserved.

While Vandorn was exercising his brain to invent some plan of escape, he observed that the boat was slowing up, as if about to make a landing. On the shore he saw a cluster of small huts ; and on deck, as if ready to debark, were several persons. Here was the chance !

He rushed off for his friends, and told them to make ready at once to land, to leave behind them all articles that they could spare, to bring their guns along, and to show no evidence of nervousness. Kaftans and shabkas were thrown aside, and with a few blankets, their faithful kettle, a few condiments, and plenty of ammunition, they took their places quietly on different parts of the boat. The bell rang two or three times ; the boat pulled to ; the gang-plank was thrown down, and our friends walked ashore promptly and without exciting any particular attention. The boat quickly backed out into the river, while the fugitives, avoiding the small village, plunged into the tall grass beyond and disappeared.

They lost no time now, though it was anything

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but easy to make their way through the grass. It switched their faces. It wrapped itself around their legs. It added irritation to difficulty. But they continued at a good pace despite all hindrances. Night was not far away. The houses of Kharbarovka, with the fanciful domes of a few Greek churches towering above, could be seen high and clear upon a promontory frowning upon the river.

After a while they passed out of the grass, reaching a hilly country which was under cultivation. There were no fences to hinder their progress, and the cultivated land was entirely deserted at that hour. The nearest houses were those of the town. They made rapid headway now. The great sea of grass began again not far away, below the town, and they were anxious to reach this cover before anything like a systematic search could be organized for them. They counted upon the probability that when their absence was discovered at Kharbarovka, it would be some time before Valerianoff could learn just where they left the boat.

The sun had set some time before. The white light of a few stars began to glimmer in the darkening sky. Out of the silent plain, faintly a-quiver with the dusky twilight, arose the town like a gloomy Argus with its hundred eyes of fire.

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They were testing all their nerves now. Not a word was spoken as they flitted along like startled pilgrims in the grey evening. When night had fallen the terrible jungle had taken them to its heart.

They found a place where they could make a fire on the bank of a creek, and they contented themselves with a frugal meal. Their hunger appeased, they resumed their journey by the light of the moon. It was necessary now that they should be as watchful as lynxes, for the jungle into which they were penetrating deeper and deeper was the haunt of many wild animals. Therefore their guns were kept ready for any attack that might come from this source. The women were quite brave now, and they did not seem to fear the dangers of the jungle as much as they did the pursuit of their Ivan the terrible.

The outlines of the town were at last lost in the tremulous mist of the plain, but the fugitives did not slacken their pace. As long as there was a moon to guide them they held on their way ; and only when it went down and a thick blackness enveloped the steppe did they allow themselves to rest. Upon beds of beaten-down grass they spread their blankets, and fell asleep, each of the men, however, serving his time as a watch. At dawn Vassily made his way to the river, and drew therefrom a few sal-

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mon, on which they breakfasted. Then gathering up their traps they resumed their march.

During the day they had some diversion in the way of securing game, but they did not allow themselves the luxury of resting.

That afternoon they met the first human being whom they had seen in the jungle. He was a Ghilyak, a wild son of the steppe, one of those people who, like the American Indian, are gradually being pushed beyond the pale of civilization. This native was a hunter, as they could see, and they deemed it worth while to make friends with him. He had a comfortable smattering of Russian, and he was not hard to understand.

Speranski thought it would be a good idea to engage the services of the Ghilyak as a guide; and the display of a few coin soon brought about a satisfactory arrangement. Their objective point now was a town called Tsyanka, to which the Ghilyak offered to conduct them.

Their new acquaintance proved to be a good-humoured sort of a vagabond, who was highly elated at the prospect of earning his money so easily. He told them much of the configuration of the country, the kind of people they would encounter along the river, and gave them some valuable points regarding the game to be met with.

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They pitched their camp that evening in a jungle, where there was a profusion of cork-trees and walnuts hung with climbers and adorned with festoons of blossoms. It was decided not to make a fire ; for the Ghilyak informed them that they were now in one of the wildest parts of the Amur region. Bears made the jungle their home, and tigers swam the river frequently, and hunted the deer which were plentiful thereabout.

It cannot be said that they prepared for the night with any particular cheerfulness. The Ghilyak had babbled enormously during the afternoon about the famous man-eater, throwing in plentiful boasts of his own prowess. Devereux and Vandorn, who had the sportsman's instinct well developed in them, would have relished a brush with one of the royal beasts ; but their anxiety for the safety of the party was so great that they hoped to get through the jungle without meeting any of these formidable foes. At the town of Tyanka it was their intention to send one of their number out to buy some sort of boat, if it were possible, and to make the rest of the journey on the river under their own direction, unimpeded by drowsy captains and other annoyances.

Every waking moment now was filled with anxiety, and even such hasty sleep as they took

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was suffused with wild and adventurous dreams. The fitful slumber they obtained could hardly be called rest, for it preserved the nervous strain in which they were. This anxiety was not in any way of selfish origin, for all the men in the party were personally brave ; but they were concerned for the Countess and Valérie.

The climax of their long and dangerous undertaking was approaching. They surmised that in addition to the natural dangers of this wild and terrible country, a relentless band of Cossacks, under a relentless leader, was pursuing them, and that toward the mouth of the river they would have to pass through a swarm of their foes. All of these considerations made their wooing of the goddess Sleep decidedly desultory and unsatisfactory. Nevertheless they threw themselves down under a cork-tree and endeavoured to sleep, leaving Vassily and the Ghilyak on watch.

Valérie and the Countess, who had learned to feel safe with their protectors, who seldom dwelt upon the dangers of the journey, suffered less from anxiety than did their companions ; and, being very weary from their long tramp through the suffocating grass, fell into a sound sleep.

About midnight the men were in an uneasy slumber, except the two watchers, Vassily and the hunter.

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The moon was high in the heavens. Its wizard work was apparent in the jungle and in the silver mist with which it flooded the waving sea of grass.

A fitful wind played upon the reeds of the steppe, creating a ghostly, fearful music. Perhaps it was the vast loneliness that brooded over that unlovely region, so hostile to man, so friendly to savage beasts, that caused Vassily, stout heart though he was, to feel an indefinable presence in the air. He could fancy that ghosts were making that rustling in the grass, and that glittering eyes were looking at him from the spectral steppe. The Ghilyak certainly felt no such subtle influence in the night, for he drowsed at his post under a cork-tree.

A rifle-shot rang sharp and clear upon the air. The whistling winds brought to the ears of the watcher the confused, terror-stricken sound of human voices, and above all rose, terrific and sonorous, the maddened cry of an animal stung with pain.

The Ghilyak awoke from his cat nap, and involuntarily clutched his gun tighter. A moment later the whole camp was awake and wondering.

Not far away they could hear agonized cries, the voices of human beings in distress, an occasional shot from a gun, and the wrathful animal roar that seemed to roll through the grass and

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fill the night with horror. There could be no mistaking the sound.

It was the roar of the hungry tiger.

The Ghilyak seemed to know what to do. The ladies were hurried to a tall walnut-tree close at hand and helped up it. There was no help for it. They were told to climb as high as they could. The Doctor, being slightly disabled, was sent up after them to assist in their protection.

“Are they safe there?” asked Devereux anxiously.

“Yes,” replied the Ghilyak. “The tiger no climb.”

This was practically true. The tiger does climb, but he does it badly and awkwardly; and the Doctor and the ladies were virtually safe.

The cries of agony increased, and the animal roar became louder and more horrible. It was evident that more than one of the royal beasts was abroad.

Devereux and his men had up to this time arranged themselves to repel an attack, but it became apparent to them that they were in no immediate danger, and that another party in the jungle was in sore distress.

“We cannot remain here and allow those people to be killed,” said Devereux.

The rest eagerly caught up the suggestion.

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The Ghilyak once more assured them that the ladies were safe. The word was given to advance to the rescue, and they hastened forward, the hunter leading through the silver-tipped grass. The direction was plain, and a short run brought them to the patch of jungle from which issued the noise.

“Aim at the eyes,” cautioned the Ghilyak as they beat their way through the underbrush and the hanging creepers toward an open spot where the battle was raging.

Devereux and Speranski were close upon the heels of the guide, while Vandorn and Vassily were just behind. They did not heed the scratches received on face and hands from the briars. In their eagerness they had no thought or feeling for anything but the combat.

Through the interstices of the jungle they caught the sheen of the silvered leaping of tigers, whose mighty springs were the synonym of death striking in its most awful form. But not until they broke through the undergrowth did they realize the full horror and the full grandeur of the duel that had been going on. Half a dozen dead bodies of men lay upon the ground, while a frightful contest still raged, between a splendid infuriated mother and her savage children on one side and four or five men on the other.

The tiger mother had evidently gone forth

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with her cubs to slaughter. Into many a battle had she led them before ; many a handy trick in killing had she skilled them in. With a proud and savage fondness she had shown them the glory of slaughter, and they had taken her teachings to heart, and now repaid her maternal kindness with a ferocity that sometimes dwarfed her own.

The men had been taken unaware. The scattered embers of a fire through which the battle had whirled showed that they had, by their own carelessness, invited the attack of those midnight prowlers, abroad for blood. There was something sickening in the sight of the dead bodies of the men on the ground with the dead bodies of two cubs sprawled over them.

But what a splendour was the tiger mother ! Infuriated at the death of her savage cubs, she had become an incarnate demon of destruction. Her sinewy body sprang through the air with the grace of the swallow, the stripes thereon writhing in the moonlight like the hurried flight of intertwined serpents, and her eyes flaming with the green fire of exalted murder inherited from the palæolithic age of limitless battle, beast against beast. She was nature's dream of power, sublime essence of conflict, preserved from the vast battle-ground of inharmonious elements, through ages of dying species, of

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throttling, stifling, ever-warring things, up to the time of man, the bringer of peace and the greatest warrior of all.

Just as our friends arrived upon the scene they saw her strike down a man as one would brush aside a reed, and then with a deadly precision sever his vertebral column at the neck with her teeth. Death came to the poor fellow as promptly as thought. Three of the young tigers were at the same time engaged in what appeared to be a hand-to-hand conflict with their antagonists. Two of them felled their foes to earth and inserted their keen molars in their necks ; and the new-comers were powerless to aid them, so close was the embrace of man and beast. The third was not fortunate. It had attacked a foe who had a few charges still in his pistol, and these he fired with so steady and telling an aim that it rolled over on the ground vanquished.

But the tiger mother was now disengaged, and she turned her eyes of death upon the slayer.

With an oath he made the discovery that his pistol was empty, and he flung it angrily aside and drew his sword. He was a tall, superbly shaped man, and his one desperate chance for life now was his skill with that weapon ; but what could he do with it against the prowess of the tiger mother and her heart of fire ?

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Devereux took in the situation at a glance. "Kill the cubs," he said to his companions, "and I'll handle the big one."

The youngsters had already seen the newcomers, and they did not wait to be attacked. With the roar of battle in their throats they hurled themselves through the air like stones from a catapult, and made for their new prey. Vandorn's nerve was as steady as iron. His eye gleamed, but his head was cool. He took as deliberate aim with his rifle as if he were shooting at a target, and he put a deadly pellet of lead between the two baleful eyes, and that was all the shooting he had to do. The young tiger fell dead at his feet, and Vassily, who was at his side, did not get a chance to fire.

Speranski was not quite so fortunate. He was over anxious, and he shot too soon. He just missed the fatal spot in the tiger's armour, and the maddened beast was checked but for a moment in its advance, then sprang forward with redoubled fury. Speranski and the Ghilyak gave the beast a warm welcome simultaneously. This time the lead ploughed through its brain, and with a few convulsive movements on the ground it was past doing harm.

In the meantime Devereux had seen that he must act quickly. Taking a hurried aim with a pistol, he fired at the tiger mother, the ball en-

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tering the side of her head. Quick as a flash she turned to confront the new danger which threatened her, and she at once made for the man who had put that terrible pain in her head. - With a roar that might have unstrung nerves of steel, and with eyes gleaming like stars a-fire, the mighty beast flung herself at her new foe. Her tawny skin was for a moment sheeted with silver. There was the sound as of a resistless terror rushing through the air. But Devereux stood in the moonlight as cool as a Greek statue. His nerves did not flutter. He was unconscious of fear. He knew that it was simply a question of keeping his brain clear. It was the pitting of intellect against the peerless might of an unconquered brute. He picked out the spot between the flaming emeralds, and sent the ball straight into the tiger's brain.

This brought her to earth. She was already marked for death, but the instinct to fight, to kill, was so inwoven in her entire consciousness that she continued irregularly, like a blind or drunken thing, to fight her way forward; but Devereux saw the light clouding in her eyes, proving that he had given her the death-wound, and he avoided her easily, the two moving about in a half-circle. Her movements became slower and slower, but Devereux watched her like a hawk, ready to fire again if she proved to be

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shamming. She gasped for life, quivering in every vein, and then the magnificent beast felt her wonderful power and fierceness going from her ; perhaps in a tiger's way she wondered at the weird, mysterious peace that was subduing her untamed heart, and then she lay dead at the feet of the American.

For a minute Devereux stood there in the solemn wilderness utterly oblivious of what was going on around him, looking musingly upon the slain tiger, the largest he had ever seen ; and he realized as he had not done during the contest how near he had been to death.

He had been drawn away from his companions, had forgotten them, when he was aroused from his reverie by strange sounds, the noise of steel clashing with steel ; and looking in surprise across the fatal arena, he saw two men fencing.

Could he be dreaming ? No ; it was not possible.

Vassily, Vandorn, and the Ghilyak were looking on, while Speranski was engaging the tall soldier whom they had just rescued from death. Even before Devereux could realize that it was a serious contest, Speranski was wounded and had staggered and fallen to earth. The tall fellow standing over him was about to plunge his sword into his heart, when Vandorn, cover-

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ing him with a pistol, cried, “Stop, you ruffian ! You have probably killed him already.”

Speranski killed ? Devereux could not trust his hearing. With an exclamation of astonishment he crossed the open space, angrily demanding an explanation.

“Is this the way you repay those who have served you ?” he began ; but he went no further, for his eyes met a pair of eyes as full of hate as those of the tiger he had just slain.

An answering hate flashed from his own as he said, “At last !”

“At last !” hissed Ivan Valerianoff, tapping his sword significantly.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MEETING IN THE JUNGLE.

WHEN Marcelle Speranski had gone forward to greet the sole survivor of the party that had encamped on the spot, he found to his amazement that it was Ivan Valerianoff. The sight of Marcelle served to infuriate the young Russian.

“I came to catch you,” said Ivan with a sneer, “but the beasts were on your side.”

“We have reversed the situation, and captured you,” said Speranski.

“You need not think that. I have a sword left,” said Ivan.

“Well, we can kill you, if you won’t be captured,” said Speranski cheerfully.

“Yes, if you are a coward; but if you are a brave man, as you pretend to be, make your pretence good and meet me with the sword. You will find one on yonder officer’s body.”

Speranski leaped at the chance, took the

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sword, and was in position before any one could remonstrate. He was a good swordsman and a plucky fellow, but he was no match for Valerianoff with his arm of iron guided by almost matchless skill. That which was inevitable befell.

When Devereux took up Speranski's sword and prepared to renew the combat there was a general outcry.

"Don't fight him," gasped the wounded Russian. "The rest of the party depend on you. Without you they cannot escape."

"Never mind, Marcelle," said Devereux gently. "There will be no danger. I promise to show this knight here how to fence."

A cynical smile of complacent power curled about Ivan's mouth, and he laughed.

"I'm opposed to this thing," said Vandorn; "it is quixotic foolishness. What we ought to do is to fill this fellow's carcass with cold lead. Frank, you're a fool to give the scoundrel such a chance! I never saw a handier man with his sword."

But Devereux was obstinate.

"Valerianoff is all you say," said Devereux, "and don't deserve an honourable death; but I propose to give him a chance for his life."

All this was said in Russian. The dark face of Valerianoff grew darker still at the words,

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and he fingered his sword with a fierce, exulting eagerness.

“The appeal to your courage has not been in vain,” said Ivan with a sneer.

“You are mistaken,” said Devereux coolly; “it is my vanity that has been appealed to.”

“It is a pity to have to wound it,” said Ivan with a laugh.

Ignoring this jest, Devereux took off his coat and vest with great deliberation, and handed them to Vassily. Then he rolled up his right shirt-sleeve, baring an arm that was a marvel of strength and proportion. In the moonlight they looked well matched. Ivan was a trifle taller and heavier, but Devereux had the Indian’s straightness, and the liteness of the panther.

They were not long in acquiring their positions. The hearts of the watchers were in their mouths; they felt that so much was at stake. Vandorn was revolving in his mind a solemn resolution to shoot Valerianoff on the spot if a hair of Devereux’s head was harmed; but before he had reached a decision in the matter, the clashing of the swords announced that the fight had begun.

Ivan expected to force the fighting from the start, but Devereux was too quick for him; and

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to his surprise he found himself on the defensive, and resorting to various parades to meet the swift attacks of the American. This manœuvre soon put Devereux in possession of Valerianoff's favorite defence, and he gradually diminished the fervour of his assault.

The Russian felt relieved, though he could not escape the impression that he was being played with. He did not enjoy being on the defensive. His cheeks were warm and his black eyes were a-sparkle with hatred. His mettle had been touched at last. His main idea now was to fight his antagonist down by the sheer force of his strong arm, to give him such a furious bout as he had never dreamed of.

If Devereux had a favourite parade, Valerianoff was too angry to have possessed himself of the secret of it. Under his vigorous onslaught the swords were ringing now. Devereux retreated under the apparently irresistible advance, averting every lunge with beautiful promptness ; but it seemed to his anxious friends he was not quite heavy enough to stand up before the stalwart Hussar.

As they circled over the open space Devereux unfortunately slipped over one of the dead men and fell almost to his knee.

A cry of horror went up from the friends of the American, and Vandorn vowed he would

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kill the Russian if he succeeded by taking advantage of such an accident.

Valerianoff did take advantage of it. With a savage exultation he rushed at his foe, multiplying blows and thrusts with inconceivable rapidity; but to his surprise as well as his rage Devereux rose to his full height and stood before him as staunch as a stone wall, and with a smile on his face.

“Hurrah!” said Vandorn, throwing his cap up in the air. “Ye gods! did you ever see anything like it? The Russian is done for!”

Valerianoff had found that in spite of his impetuosity he could go no further. Devereux’s sword was playing dangerously near his heart, and, almost before he was aware of it, he was on the defensive. It was now the American’s time to astonish the Russian with his quality. His sword flashed in the moonlight like the play of electricity. He feinted, he threw his adversary on parade, he went from attack to attack with the rapidity of thought, and once he inflicted a cut that laid bare the Russian’s cheek-bone. Valerianoff, confused, angry, and astonished, retreated, but still managed to defend himself. On his face there was now the look of the mastered wild animal. In a half-hearted way he endeavoured to reverse the order of things; but every time he did so he saw that

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his life was in danger, and that his only safety lay in the promptness of his parades. Never had Vandorn and his companions seen such evil on a human face as they saw on that of Valerianoff.

“He’s almost gone,” said Vandorn. “He’d like to eat Devereux alive, but this time he will furnish the funeral baked meats.”

Devereux picked his opportunity with great coolness; and when Valerianoff answered his attack with an unskilful parade, leaving himself exposed to an expert swordsman, the point of the American’s sword went promptly for his heart. With a groan and an oath the Russian fell to the ground, where he became insensible.

“He’s a good swordsman,” said Devereux, throwing his weapon aside, “but deficient in resource and originality.”

“He doesn’t seem to be dead,” said Vandorn, examining him. “Whenever I look at the fellow’s face I am convinced that in a previous phase of existence he was a hyena.”

“He can’t do us any more harm at any rate,” said Devereux. “If he can live through all this, let him have the chance. If he does not die, it will be a month or more before he can do any one any further mischief.”

The two Americans wished to preserve the skins of the tigers they had killed, and the Ghil-

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yak was left behind to skin the beasts, while the others bore Speranski back to camp. Though he had never lost consciousness he was very faint; but he declared that Devereux's victory had cured him, and that he would soon be all right. It was impossible to tell how dangerous was the wound he had received until the Doctor had examined it; and as gently as they could they carried him away, leaving behind them nearly a dozen dead Cossacks and the bodies of the six tigers.

To their great relief the Doctor pronounced Speranski's wound to be only slight.

The remainder of the night was spent in relating all that had befallen them; and though the cheeks of the women often paled at the recital, they rendered thanks to God that no further misfortune had overtaken them. It cannot be said that any one regretted the fate that had at last caught up with Ivan Valerianoff.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

As soon as the day began to break the march was taken up toward Tsyanka. This was the most tiresome part of their journey; for they had to carry Speranski most of the time. The country was a lowland, subject to the summer overflows of the Amur, and the vegetation was of the rankest description. The Japanese *trochostigma* and other climbers wove together an almost impenetrable thicket; and but for the services of the Ghilyak, who was familiar with the deer-paths, they would have wound themselves up in such a tangle that it is doubtful whether they would ever have got out.

When the town of Tsyanka finally appeared Vassily and the Ghilyak were sent forward to purchase a boat, while the rest of the party skirted the town, and encamped below it on the river.

There were a number of fishermen at Tsyanka,

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a small town of no importance, and they had every sort of craft from a dug-out canoe to a steam-tug. Vassily found a small craft which suited his purpose. It contained a coal-oil engine, and could be run with this motor, or propelled with oars. It was covered with a light roof, from which canvas curtains could be let down so as to form small compartments. The owner of the handy little boat was unwilling to part with it ; but when he saw a chance to clear a handsome sum upon it, he swallowed his reluctance.

About dark ,accordingly, Vassily and the hunter were moving serenely dōwn the river with their new possession. A few miles below the town a green lantern hanging from a tree on the river-bank told them where the party were encamped.

All were well satisfied with the purchase, and felt that they were in better shape to reach their destination. If Captain Joel Quincy kept his agreement, and was waiting for them at Nikolai-evsk, their enterprise ought to be successful. They had, it is true, some anxiety on this score, for the authorities at Nikolaievsk might be on the alert, and unless they could establish communication promptly, their expedition might become a complete fiasco.

The journey of three hundred miles to the

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mouth of the river was unattended by any incident of importance. At night they could run their boat in among the tall grass of the islands, when it was too foggy for travel; and the curtains secluded them from observation whenever it was necessary. The trip on the river was beneficial to Speranski, whose wound healed rapidly.

On the evening of the 2d of June the block-house and barracks of Nikolaevsk appeared in the distance; and the boat was allowed to drift with the current, in order that night might overtake them before they reached the town.

The masts and rigging of two or three ships could be seen in the harbour. Was the Dart among them?

Night came on as they drifted; and they swung out their green lantern with quick-beating hearts. As they passed the city they saw to their delight a red lantern waved from one of the ships. It would be impossible to describe their feelings at the sight. The women almost fainted with excess of joy.

They concluded that it would not be safe for them to make toward the town. So Vandorn wound three circles with his lantern in the air, and shortly afterward a red light was seen gliding over the water. The skipper had sent a boat for them. When it came within hailing

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distance Vandorn asked : "Is that the Dart's boat ?"

"Yes," was the reply of the boatswain in charge. "We are looking for Mr. Vandorn and Mr. Devereux."

"Well, you've found us," said Vandorn.

Our party and their belongings were at once transferred to the boatswain's gig, and the delighted Ghilyak received the fishing-boat as a present. If he should be overhauled by the officials, he was to know nothing of the party, but to pass himself off for a fisherman. A hearty good-bye was given, and the faithful native turned his little craft around and made his way up the river.

"The captain's orders were to keep on down the stream, and he'd follow and pick us up," said the boatswain.

"That suits us," said Devereux.

Already the Dart was weighing anchor ; and our friends waited with some anxiety to be picked up, being still uncertain as to whether any plans had been devised to intercept them or not. The town was as silent as if it were dead. A few small boats skimmed hither and thither over the river like water-spiders, but otherwise there was no sign of activity.

"Great things were expected of that town," said the Doctor. "It was to be a sort of San Francisco."

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"It appears to be enjoying a rapid decay now," said Devereux.

"I wonder where the Russian navy is?" said Vandorn. "No effort whatever seems to have been made to stop us. It's very mortifying to our vanity."

"Half of the people are supported by the government," said Paraveloff. "As long as they are supplied with food, I suppose they don't care what happens."

"We need not cry over their laziness," said Devereux.

The approach of the Dart put an end to further observations ; and they were quickly aboard and shaking hands with the affable skipper.

"Well, boys," said the captain, "you've got here in time. The Dart was a day ahead of you. I guess I left some of them Russians ashore looking for you."

"What do you mean?" said Vandorn.

"Why, nothing, except that a few of them wild-eyed Cossacks have been a-watching my boat ever since she come into harbour, to see who came aboard. Every time anybody come to trade, them fellers had a duck fit on shore until my customer went back. I kinder suspected they'd got on to your game somehow. I don't s'pose you want to linger around here, do you?"

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"No, sir," said Vandorn promptly ; "we want to get into the Pacific as soon as possible."

A few hours later the great world of waters lay before them, with the stars dimpling its dark face. And when at last they were beyond pursuit, and the exalted consciousness that they were free swelled within them, they knew such happiness as falls to the lot of but few mortals. Life was worth living merely to have experienced that sensation. Their victory over the Czar was like a dream from the days of chivalry. To have escaped from prison, to feel that they had eluded all their enemies and defied the entire machinery of the Czar, to breathe once more the air of peace and security under the Stars and Stripes, after having fought their way over frozen fields and through horrible jungles, brought to them a happiness that bewildered them and made them almost doubt the evidence of their own senses.

The effect on the spirits of the party was magical. Devereux was no longer the stern and serious knight ; he was the tender and playful lover. New tokens of love were born in the dark tenderness of Valérie's eyes, and her heart was filled with a vague, unspeakable joy. The bitter look in the Doctor's face gave way to one of gentle sadness ; and the cheery Speranski showed the sparks of his old fire and

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humour. The Countess was considerably aged by her experiences, but her cheerfulness was unimpaired.

As for Vandorn, he was radiant. He had gone through a tremendous experience, and had participated in stirring events. He liked to picture his return to New York, his welcome by the dear fellows of the clubs, and his presentation thereto of the skin of the tiger killed by himself in the wilds of the Amur. And then the rescue of distressed beauty and all that — egad ! it was an experience worth twice the sum he had spent to obtain it. And then he had an unformulated idea that he would write a letter to the Czar on the club's delicate stationery, and present to His Majesty the assurance of his distinguished consideration, and any other refined impertinence he could think of.

But little remains to be told. Devereux and Valérie were married as soon as they arrived in the United States ; and when they reached their home in the Blue Grass country, Vassily, who accompanied them, was so well pleased that he decided to remain as overseer of Devereux's farm.

Speranski's wife joined him later in New York, where he has continued the agitation for Russian liberty. The Doctor has made a con-

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siderable reputation by his important and novel discoveries regarding a fatal disease. The Countess, being a woman of broad culture, obtained a professorship in a woman's college, to teach modern languages ; and few of those who are brought in contact with her know that the motherly looking old lady is a heroine of adventure.

Vandorn was eventually enticed from his club life by a pretty siren ; and he appears to be entirely satisfied with his condition, even though, it is said, his charming wife can twist him around her finger.

Ivan Valerianoff was rescued by a party of Cossacks, and regained his strength and his wild temper, but only to be killed by a Nihilist who had sworn to punish him for his treachery.

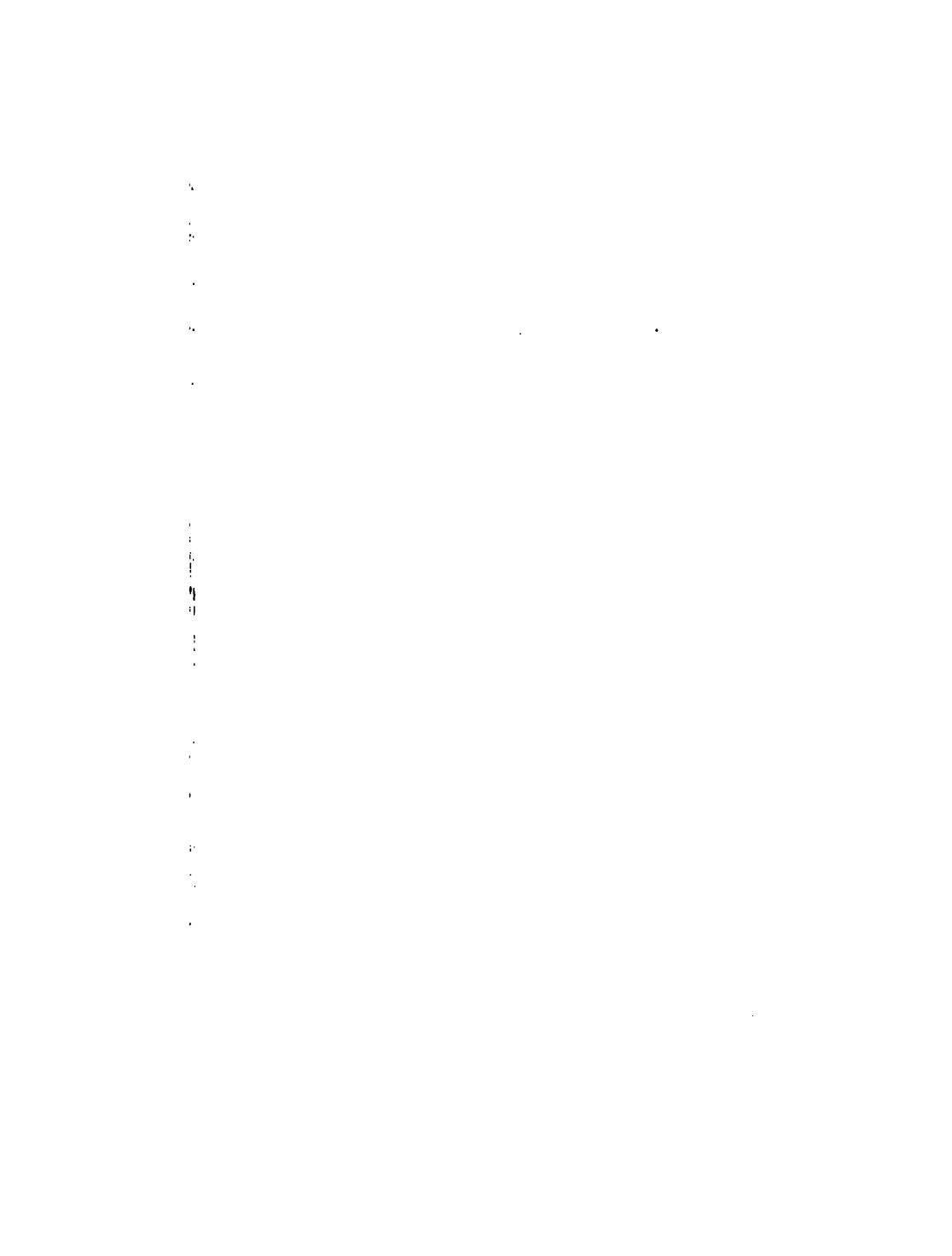
Madorog's fate is one of the mysteries of Petropavlovsk. Whether he be alive or dead no one can say.

Every year the story of human suffering is retold, — noble men and women are killed or crushed with degrading punishment ; the virtue of liberty is defiled ; the civilized world stands aghast at the crimes done in the name of the law.

But the conscience of the Czar sleeps on.

THE END.

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